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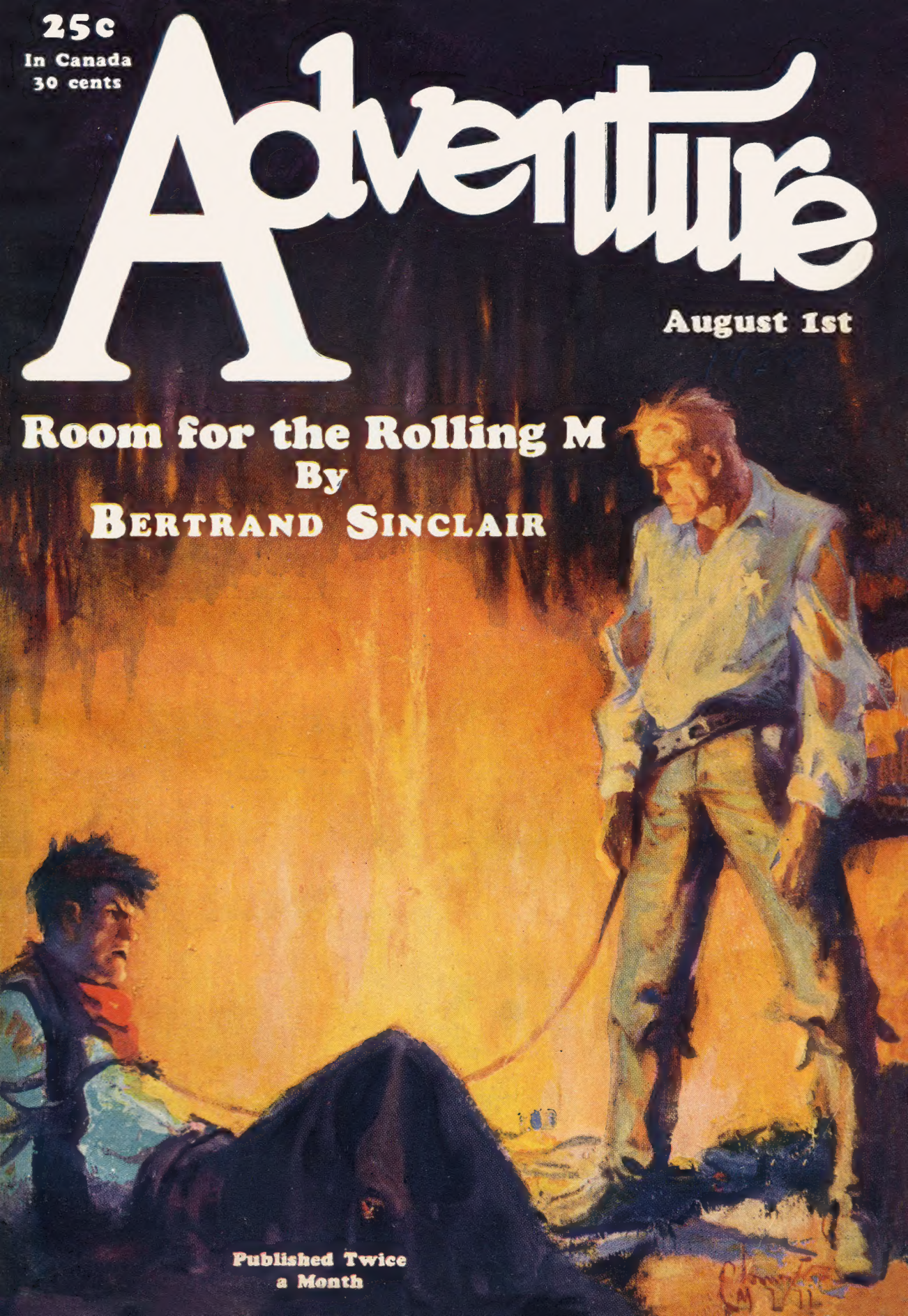
Adventure

August 1st

Room for the Rolling M

By

BERTRAND SINCLAIR



Published Twice
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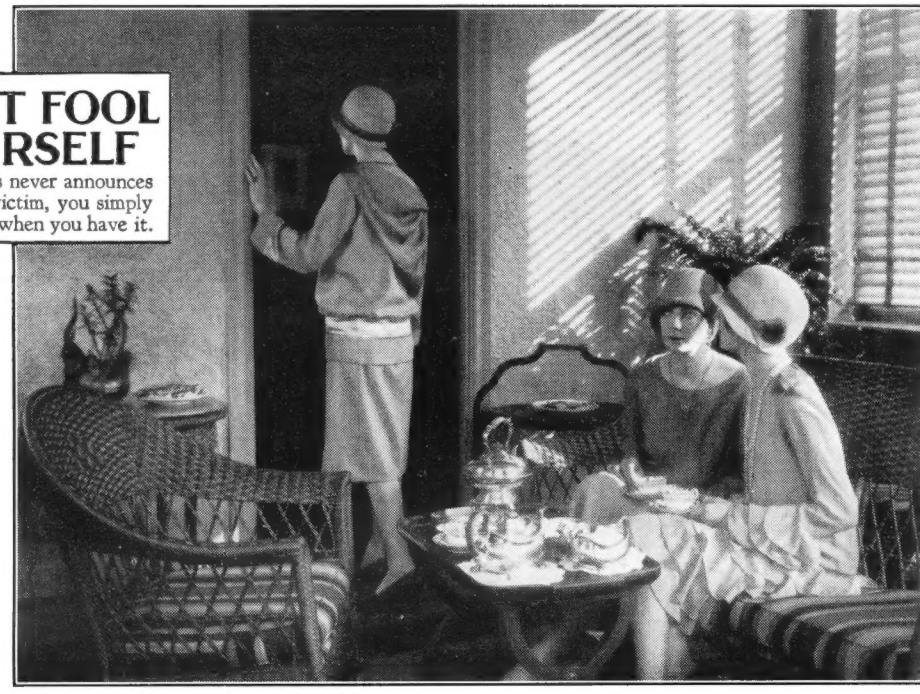
DON'T FOOL YOURSELF

Since halitosis never announces itself to the victim, you simply cannot know when you have it.



They talk about you *behind your back*

And rightly so—halitosis is inexcusable.

HALITOSIS (unpleasant breath) is the one unforgivable thing—because it is *inexcusable.*

"But how is one to know when one has halitosis?" both men and women ask.

The answer is: *You can't know.* Halitosis doesn't announce itself to the victim. That's the insidious thing about it. So thousands go through life ignorant of the fact that they are offending others to whom they desire most to appeal.

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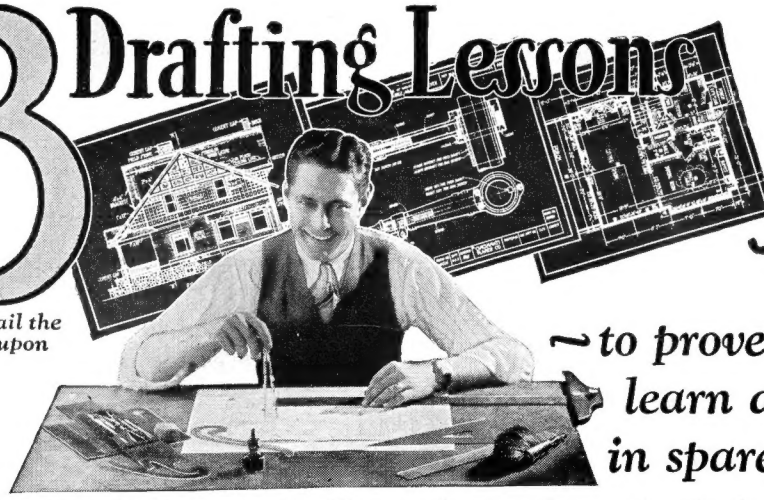

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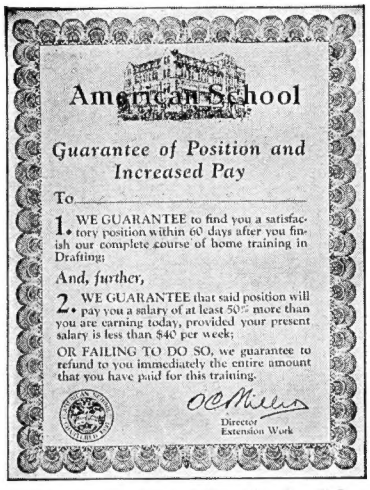
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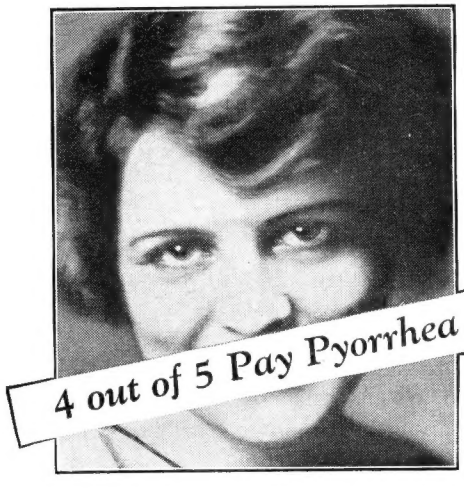

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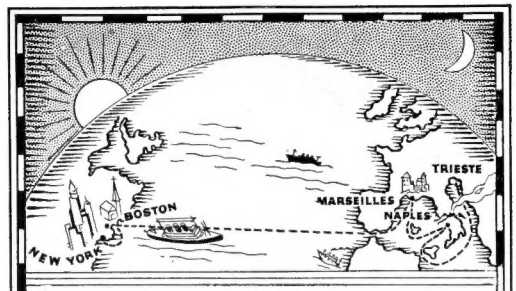

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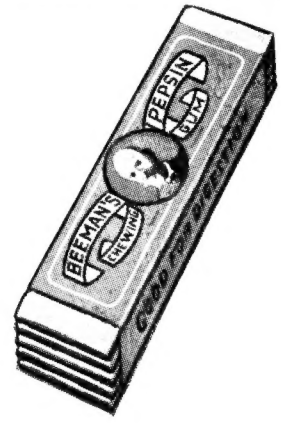

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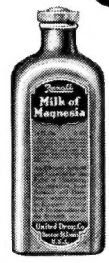

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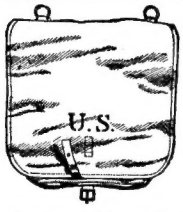

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¶ Hugh Pendexter, Captain Dingle, Thomson Burtis, Don Cameron Shafer, Charles Wesley Sanders and many others have corking stories in EVERYBODY'S for August.

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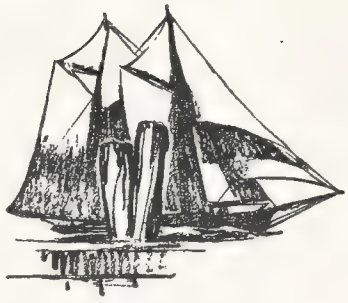

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A Complete Novel of the Range Trails

ROOM *for the* ROLLING M

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

CHAPTER I

THE LAST SHOT

ALL THAT day, and for many days before that one, Ches Williams had been pointing north across plains, broken country, creeks that were shallow and lukewarm in the hot sun, swimming rivers that were deep and swift. He had traversed the State of Wyoming, gone winging across a tier of counties in Montana as the wild goose wings his way to the sub-Arctic, driven and guided by much the same instinct. For Ches was coming home. And with the Missouri River a day's ride behind him, the Little Rockies a purple smudge on the western skyline, he came down a sloping bank to a great flat where sagebrush spread silver gray about a little town.

To many of our readers, an introduction to the work of Bertrand W. Sinclair will be superfluous, for the author of such stirring books as "North of Fifty-Three" and "Poor Man's Rock" has long held a distinguished place among authentic writers of the Old West. We hope that his new readers will find this, his first story in ADVENTURE, *as exciting as did—*

THE EDITORS

Saco hadn't changed. In a land where the frontier shifted farther on as fast as men thought they had established its uttermost limit, Saco appeared to have remained static during Ches Williams' absence. It had neither grown nor shrunk. One small hotel. Two general stores. A chophouse for hungry stragglers. A blacksmith shop. Four saloons. A high walled stockyard that covered more ground than the town itself. A railroad ran straight as an arrow across the flats. East and west for miles you could see the shining steel and the grade like a narrow band laid over the gray sage and the bleached grass where crickets chirped and the rattlesnakes and prairie dogs had gone to bed, for twilight was closing in when Ches dismounted by the door of a livery stable.

One glance over the town sufficed him. He had passed through a dozen like it between there and the Platte. His gaze did not rest with curiosity on the scattered buildings. It bore off a mile beyond to where beside a group of gnarly limbed cottonwood trees the white of two tents showed, and past them the bulky mass of a herd closing in on its bed ground. He could see the saddle-bunch scattered out to graze, hear faintly the tinkle of the leader's bells.

He had left Saco on just such an August evening with a roundup lying on the river by those cottonwoods, with a herd to ship. Four years. It might have been yesterday.

He dragged his pack into the harness room, hung his saddle by one stirrup on a

peg while the livery stable man threw hay to his horses. Then Ches hitched up his trousers, tightened his gun belt a hole.

"Who's shipping?" he asked.

"Half Moon," the man answered as briefly.

"Cooper still wagon boss?" Ches inquired.

"Uh-uh. Frank Duchain."

"The hell you say! How'd *he* ever get to be range boss of the Half Moon?"

The fellow grinned.

"More'n you have asked that. Say, for a stranger, seems like your face is familiar. Can't place you, though."

Williams smiled. From seventeen to twenty-one makes a difference. He didn't recall the stableman, either.

"I'm Ches Williams," he said. "Probably it's the family mug you recognize, unless you've been here a long time. And I don't ever remember you around Saco."

"You wouldn't," the man said. "I come about the time you left. So you're the prodigal son, eh?" He laughed with the easy familiarity of his kind. "You favor the Old Man a lot, all right. More'n your brother does. I've only seen him once or twice. You're a Williams, all right."

Ches nodded.

"Cooper still in the country?" he asked.

"Baldy's dead."

Williams looked at him for a second. There was a trace of feeling in the two words.

"I have been south of Wyoming for four years," he said slowly. "Didn't keep tracks of things here. Natural or otherwise?"

The stableman shrugged his shoulders.

"Mostly otherwise," he replied. "You'll hear all about it if you ask much, I expect. I liked old Baldy Cooper, an'

I never did like Frank Duchain, an' I don't care who knows it. The Half Moon gave Baldy a raw deal. He's dead an' his kid is a biscuit shooter in Sam's Place. I don't admire either your family policy nor your foreman, Mister Chester Williams. An' I don't care who knows that either."

"You know," Ches said placidly, "if I felt I had to live up to the family reputation I'd probably take a fall out of you for that sort of talk. But it happens I don't like the Half Moon foreman any better than you do. And the Williams family could always hold up its own end. So I guess you and me won't go to the mat over that, right now. But it strikes me you talk too much, just the same."

The man laughed.

"You made yourself quite a rep around here as a kid," said he. "I guess I do talk too much sometimes. Still, I don't take back nothin'. Man's got a right to his own opinions."

Ches nodded.

"Your opinions about Frank Duchain is probably like mine," he murmured.

"Oh, well," the stableman grinned. "You should fret about Duchain. The Half Moon'll kill the fatted calf for you, maybe."

Ches shook his brown head.

"I'm too hungry to wait for any fatted calf," said he. "So I guess I'll go eat. Did you say Vinnie Cooper was working in Sam Murray's restaurant?"

"Yeah. Only a feller name uh Scott has it now."

THE HOTEL, the stores, the stable, practically all the two score buildings that composed Saco stood in a row facing the railroad track. A dull red station and section house, and the sprawling bulk of the stockyards lay on the other side. A plank walk fronted the line of buildings, looking always south into the eye of the sun. Ches strode along this walk between hitching racks in the dusty street and windows in which oil lamps began to glow. He passed the hotel where meals were served at stated hours, went by a store and a saloon, turned into a place flanked by a storekeeper's residence and another saloon.

It was a narrow building with a square false front. Big painted letters proclaimed it as "Sam's place." A counter of plain wood was flanked by a dozen stools. Six small tables stood against the opposite wall. The kitchen was part of the rear, open to the gaze of those who dined. A man in a white apron and a chef's cap moved about a range. A girl worked behind the counter, arranging dishes. Two sheepherders, one getting drunk, the other sobering up, occupied a table, yammering over their food. Otherwise the place was empty.

Ches perched himself on a stool. The girl put a pen scrawled menu before him, waited for his order. Ches didn't look at the menu at first. He had put his hat on a stool beside him. He sat running the fingers of one hand through glossy brown hair with a reddish tinge and a slight wave in it, a purely unconscious gesture, because he stared steadily at the girl until a faint color rose in her cheeks. But her voice when she spoke was quite composed. Her words were obliquely a gentle rebuke to that searching gaze.

"What are you going to have?"

Ches glanced over the slip.

"A steak. Potatoes Lyonnaise. Is that *real* strawberry shortcake, or berries out of a can?"

"Fresh berries. A nester over on the river grows them," she explained. "And real cream."

"Good," said Ches. "Leave out the potatoes and make that shortcake order double."

She brought him his steak. When, later, she came bearing a little mound of red and white and yellow to set before him Ches sampled a berry with his fork, took a bit of the shortcake.

"Once, a long time ago," he said reflectively, "a girl I knew in the Larb Hills made me a shortcake like this outa wild strawberries. It was sure good."

Vinnie Cooper's blue eyes looked

interest, and puzzlement too. Ches laid down his fork.

"Don't you know me, Vin?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Gosh, nobody does. Maybe they don't want to," he complained. "I must'a' growed up. So have you, Vinnie. So you don't remember the ripsnorting Williams kid?"

She put her hands on the counter and leaned toward him.

"Is it really you, Ches Williams?" she demanded.

"Sure is. Why, I thought I was the only one you ever made a wild strawberry shortcake for."

"I can hardly believe it is you," she muttered.

"*You* haven't changed much," he told her.

"For the worse, if any."

What she meant by that cryptic answer Ches did not at the moment inquire. From a far, faint patter the sound of hoofs became a staccato drum in the street, bringing up at the saloon next door in a fog of dust, punctured by laughter, a few exuberant whoops. Some light hearted soul emptied a six-shooter at the sky.

"Cowboys in town," Ches observed.

VINNIE COOPER went away to an urn simmering over a blue alcohol flame to draw him a cup of coffee. Twilight had deepened into darkness. The white aproned man lit four lamps and hung them on the restaurant wall. The sheepherders paid their supper charge and departed. Ches sat eating his strawberry shortcake. He could not see through those windows into the night, but he could hear distant voices, the clank of spurs passing and repassing on the sidewalk. There would be riders he knew out there, riders he liked—and one or two he did not like. A queer sort of smile flitted across his face.

This was his home range, his home town. His birthplace lay forty miles south of Saco. Ches and his brother were almost the first white children born north of the Missouri River in Montana, sons of a cattleman, growing up themselves to be cattlemen. Only Ches was a sort of prodigal son, returned after four years wandering.

But he had eaten no husks. Or perhaps it would be more nearly the truth to say that he had eaten his husks before he left, in the way of injustice and bitterness and misunderstanding. There was a dim idea in his mind when he went away that sometime he would return like an avenging angel. He had outgrown that inner fury. He had come back partly for the obscure reason that brings salmon back to the streams in which they were spawned, and partly because, having come to manhood rather prematurely, he had got into the way of playing his own hand in his own fashion. It suited him to come back to Saco. And there were material reasons now which had not seemed so important then.

"Vin," he said, when the girl passed before him about some task, "how come you're holding down this kind of a job? Baldy drew big pay for years from the outfit. He never threw his money away. He had land and cattle. What happened?"

The girl's face hardened.

"They killed him and stole everything he had," she said simply, and passed on about her work.

She was a slender thing with ash colored hair, very striking violet blue eyes. A few freckles accentuated the delicate texture of a perfect skin. For the rest her mouth was a little too wide for beauty, and her nose was anything but classical Greek. Nevertheless, in a country where good looks were more plentiful than the wholesome freshness of youth, Virginia Cooper was worth a second look on purely physical grounds.

She was Texas-born, and she was a Cooper—and that meant something in the cow country, any part of it from the Rio Grande to the Canada line. She looked like something more than a youthful waitress now, when she came back to Ches. Her blue eyes burned.

"I hadn't heard," he said. "How was it?"

"I can't tell you," Vinnie returned. "If you stay around you'll hear what's known. You can figure the rest out for yourself."

"I might hear lies," Ches lowered his voice. "They told 'em about me. Was Frank Duchain mixed up in it?"

She made a quick gesture. Spurs jingled at the door. The mosquito screen flew open. Half a dozen riders strode in, climbed stools. They bantered the girl as she laid plates for them. They had been drinking. Fresh off the range, the whisky had got quickly into their blood. They were, in Sam's Place at least, decorously riotous, and Vinnie paid little attention to their gabble. She answered only direct questions, and those curtly.

Ches had finished his supper, but he lingered over a cigaret. He wanted to talk to Vinnie Cooper. He wanted to know about certain things. Coming back had seemed simple, a matter attended merely by certain risks which he discounted. He expected to have a more or less stormy session with his father. That didn't trouble him. There were no complications that he foresaw, when he crossed Wyoming.

He was not so sure of that now. In his school days—abruptly terminated by the matter that had sent him into voluntary exile—Ches had encountered the theorem that the simple tends to evolve into the complex. He began to appreciate that statement now.

Vinnie Cooper set various dishes before the Half Moon riders. Ches eyed the men casually as they ate. Two he knew. He had stood night guard with one of them that last unforgettable summer on the Half Moon range. The others were new men. They were talking about their work. A curious note sounded in their voices when they mentioned their wagon-boss. It made Ches smile. The fact that they were half-seas over didn't amuse him—although it was less than none of his business.

In the old days no Half Moon rider tanked up while a beef herd was being held to ship. But Duchain was range boss now. Ches frowned. Then he grinned at the idea of his being concerned with that. It was nothing much to him. The Half Moon had cut him out. If it were going to hell, let it go! Only—he shrugged his shoulders impatiently, thinking of Frank Duchain in Baldy Cooper's saddle, figuratively, and Cooper's daughter slinging hash to Half Moon riders her father had bossed for a decade.

Then a new note in the hilarity next door struck on his attentive ear. It had been growing more pronounced. A gun popped in the neighboring saloon. A man's voice arose protesting, placating—the bartender pleading for his glassware. Another shot or two. Loud laughter.

A bullet smashed through the wall of Sam's Place. It ripped the side out of a can of blueberries in a pyramid on the shelf. The juice splattered on Vinnie Cooper's neck and shoulders. The bullet passed between Ches and a Half Moon rider, plowing splinters out of the counter.

Vinnie didn't cry out. She put her hands on the counter and stared at the mess, brushed the blue smear off her cheek. The restaurant owner lumbered out from the kitchen, growling at the damage. The cowboys on the stools looked disturbed. But it was to Ches that Vinnie's white face turned for a second in mute appeal before she began to remove dishes with shaking fingers.

Ches slid off his stool. He took up his hat without a word, laid a dollar on the counter and walked out of the place.

He paused on the sidewalk long enough to loosen the .45 in its holster. The picture of Vinnie's frightened face troubled him for a moment. A curious eagerness to hurt some one, and a very definite idea whom he wanted to hurt quickened his pulse.

Then he stepped briskly through the swinging doors of the saloon that abutted the restaurant.

His eye ran over the dozen or so men ranged along the bar, upon two or three carelessly swinging their legs from

a seat on the edge of a billiard table.

"Who fired that last shot?" he asked quite casually.

CHAPTER II

"OPEN SEASON ON SKUNKS"

FOR A matter of perhaps five seconds no one answered. Then one drawled—

"Well, if it isn't Mister Chester Williams Junior, after lo, these many years."

That was Duchain. Strange, Ches reflected, that his enemies should recognize him while his friends must be informed of his identity. He had not learned that hate is more enduring than love. But recognition did not sidetrack him.

"Who fired that last shot?" he repeated. "Was it you, Duchain?"

"I don't shoot wild," Duchain replied. "You ought to know that."

There was just the slightest stress on the personal pronoun.

"Nor do I," Ches answered curtly. "*You* know that too, I think. Who did, then?"

"I expect I did."

A man detached himself from the others. He was tall and thin and quite dark. He wore his hair long, down on his shoulders like a woman. Ches would have known him by those unshorn locks if he had never seen him before, since Long-haired Mose Crane had been a well known figure in Vale County for years.

"Yes, I expect it was me. What about it?"

"Your bullet went through the wall into Sam's Place," Ches said quietly. "It came within four inches of a girl's head. It splintered the counter between me and another fellow eating supper. Has the Half Moon become a crowd of drunken fools with no more sense than to make careless play with pistols?"

The long haired one teetered on his bootheels.

"Young feller," said he grinning. "What's a hole through a restaurant wall between friends?"

"We don't happen to be friends, you and me," Ches replied calmly. "Don't shoot into Sam's Place again, any of you. There's plenty of room in the air if you have to exercise your six-guns. Nobody likes splinters in their pie, nor lead pills with their coffee."

Duchain shouldered his way forward.

"Now, Ches," he drawled, "surely you didn't get religion whilst you was gone. You don't reckon you can impose a Sunday school atmosphere on Saco, do you? It wasn't like that in the olden days. What's the idea for makin' a grandstand play over a little thing like this?"

"Do you think I'm making a grandstand play, Duchain?" Ches asked softly. "I'd be sorry to have you get that idea. I thought making grandstand plays was your speciality."

Duchain's face twisted into a grin.

"Oh, that," he answered lightly, "was when I was young and foolish. Now that I'm bowed down with responsibility I aim to be a model of carefulness. But the boys will have their fun. Come on an' have a drink, Ches, to celebrate the homecoming. It's a long time since you looked over a Saco bar."

"I don't drink," Ches said. "And I wouldn't drink with you, Duchain, if I did."

"Them's harsh words, kid," Duchain said slowly. "You seem to be kinda on the warpath. But we'll let it pass this time."

"Oh, thanks," Ches mocked. "Much obliged for your consideration. The rest of you fellows," he addressed the Half Moon riders with palpable irony, "try to have some of the same consideration your boss shows for children and old age, and don't shoot through the walls of Sam's Place any more. Not," he concluded softly, "while I'm in town, anyway."

With that he turned his back on them and walked out, went past the restaurant toward the hotel. His face shed its mask of composure worn before Duchain and

the Half Moon crew. It mirrored anger and disgust.

"Gosh darn it," he muttered as his bootheels clacked on the plank walk, "in another minute I would have gone after him right. I've got to keep my head around Duchain. Otherwise I'll be getting myself into a heap of unnecessary trouble. And I may have all of that I can handle without tangling with him over things like that. The Old Man must be slipping to let *him* run the Half Moon. I wonder just what did happen to Baldy Cooper. I wonder!"

HE WENT to bed with a variety of questions turning over in his mind. But that did not prevent his sleeping soundly, in spite of revelry along that short main street. The Half Moon riders raised intermittent commotion in Saco until past midnight. That overnight riot, however, did not interfere with their real business. For when Ches sauntered into Sam's Place at sunrise the Half Moon herd was moving up to the stockyards.

The restaurant owner himself brought his first customer's hot cakes and coffee.

"She's on shift from nine in the mornin' till nine at night," he answered Ches's inquiry about Vinnie Cooper.

And while he ate his breakfast the livery stable man came in and climbed a stool beside him.

Ches returned his nod, sat regarding the man over steaming coffee. He had flaming red hair that curled tight to his round head, a brick red face like a great apple. Once in a picture gallery in San Francisco Ches had gazed at the portrait of a rubicund monk. Except for the cowl and tonsure, its living image sat beside him.

Ches wondered why this man disliked Frank Duchain, and why he also disliked the Williams policy. Ches did not even know what that was now, whether it differed from the policy he knew of old, which was simply the policy of every big cow outfit, to own more cattle, control more range, grow bigger and richer, not always with too tender a regard for lesser folk who got in the way of their operations.

At any rate, he reflected, the fellow was a character, outspoken, genial, probably headstrong as a bull. He had the thick neck and shoulders of a bull and his voice was deep, a rumble in a forty-two inch chest. It did not surprise Ches in the least when the restaurant keeper addressed him as "Bull".

"Well, Mister Williams Junior," he looked up from his coffee, and spoke to Ches at last, "you didn't lose no time declarin' open season on skunks, I hear."

"Eh?" Ches stared at him.

"Open season on skunks, I said," the fellow grinned. "Duchain's a skunk. You an' me seem to agree on one thing. He'll be layin' for you with a friendly smile. He has a hard enough time makin' people respect him without a young squirt like you thumbin' your nose at him in public."

"All I did—"

"All you did," the stableman interrupted, "was to put him in a position where he had to either go after you open an' aboveboard or take a insult as a joke. They say you talked real plain to him an' Mose Crane. You know the Half Moon runs this town. Duchain runs the Half Moon. People are supposed to give Half Moon owners, range bosses an' riders alike, the right of way around here. You don't seem to *sabe* that."

He paused to spear a section of buckwheat cake and smear it with corn syrup.

"I'm told it was different in Baldy Cooper's time," he observed reflectively.

"I'd like to know just what happened to Cooper," Ches said. "I asked Vinnie last night. She wouldn't tell me, though she seemed to have some feeling about it. Do you know? By the way, what's your name."

"MacCormack—Bull for short." The man frowned. "Well, I do an' I don't. Got a guess an' a suspicion. Baldy was shot at the Rolling M ranch on Sun Prairie. Your brother and Frank Duchain an' Long-haired Mose found him dead,

so they say. A whisper run through the country that he'd turned on the Half Moon, that Half Moon calves were turnin' into Double C's. Anyway he was shot—by parties unknown, as the coroner's jury puts it. Right after that Duchain stepped into Cooper's shoes. That's all I *know*."

"You know more than that about Frank Duchain, or he has done something you don't like," Ches said bluntly. "You announced yourself about him to me, without beating around the bush. What was it? And just what did you mean by saying you didn't like the Williams policy?"

"Young Mister Williams," MacCormack turned his round red face on its thick neck to look squarely at Ches. He had a broad forehead, very clear, healthy looking eyes. The curly thatch of red hair fringed his brow so that he had more than ever that resemblance to a sturdy bull. "I'm darn near twice as old as you are. I can talk plain to you like an uncle. You said last night I talked too much. I do, now an' then. But you ask too many questions. If you stay around this country long enough you'll find out all you want to know. You can ask your own folks. Maybe I talk too much, but I don't tell my own troubles. *Sabe*?"

Ches nodded. MacCormack finished his coffee and slid off his stool. They walked together across the way to the livery stable. Ches saddled up.

"Do you own this barn, Bull?" he asked, when he was mounted.

"No. I'm runnin' it for Ben Harper, the hotel man. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered," Ches replied. "I wonder if Bob and Ed Doyle still have that horse ranch a ways down the river."

"They're still there," MacCormack told him.

"Good. They used to work for the Half Moon in the old days," Ches said. "I'm going down to see 'em. Don't feed that pack horse of mine too much oats. I'll be back before night."

"So long, kid. Don't take no counterfeit money."

Ches loped out past the stockyards. The Half Moon herd was bunched, milling slowly, kicking up a thin haze of dust. Riders were cutting-out all around the herd, sorting cattle by grade and brand and sex. Fifteen hundred prime beef, twenty riders; the morning sun flashing on polished horns, silver ornaments; bright gleams of steel and yellow leather darting about that unwieldly bovine mass.

Ches frowned. Duchain in command of all that. The mere reflection annoyed him. Then he pointed his horse down river. Away off he could see a dim huddle of buildings surrounded by the vivid green of an irrigated field, a green oblong that was like an emerald in an immense setting of silver gray sage.

CHAPTER III

"I DIDN'T KILL—"

A DAY or two later Ches Williams drew up on the rim of a creek bank overlooking the Half Moon. Ten miles northeast the roundup hauled toward the home ranch, riders jogging in a row ahead, chuck and bed wagons rattling and swaying behind four-horse teams. Two hundred loose saddle horses driven by a wrangler made a broad tail to this range kite.

Ches had ridden hard to overtake and pass this crew. He didn't quite know why. The roundup was merely trailing back to the heart of its range to gather another herd of beef. There was no reason why he should reach that ranch before Frank Duchain. Nevertheless he wanted to. He had an urgent desire to announce his own presence, rather than have his coming heralded by such a messenger. Yet he paused for ten minutes, sitting sidewise in his saddle and staring down at his birthplace. There had been nothing but a small log cabin, a set of corrals, then. Half Moon cattle numbered less than a thousand and the buffalo were still on the plains.

That small log house had been replaced

by a big one, with sprawling wings. The trampled earth yard where Ches and Dick had played, their first toy a rawhide string to rope chickens and the house cat, had become a lawn fringed with Lombardy poplars. All the length of Serviceberry, which he could remember as a waste of sagebrush, greasewood, thickets of wild rose, scattered cottonwoods, lay in great fields of alfalfa and timothy and bluejoint grass. Mowers whirred there now. Wagons crawled with heavy loads to growing stacks.

"She's grown like a mushroom," Ches said to himself. "Even in the four years I've been gone I can see how he's spread his fields up and down. Funny. When a man's got so much you'd think he'd be satisfied with his own."

Summers in that valley, with the Little Rockies lifting ragged peaks in the west, riding at dawn and sunset, running wolves with a pack of staghounds, playing at cowboy. Winters in town, in the State capitol, going to school, impatiently counting weeks till he could come back home, where he *felt* at home. Looking eagerly ahead to being in charge of all the Half Moon range when Baldy Cooper grew too old to ride.

A hundred thousand acres of land, thirty, forty thousand cattle, two-score riders. Ches had been too young to think of the Half Moon in terms of yearly revenue, of capital invested. He had always felt it as something big, something that took a man to handle. And he had grown up with the knowledge that it was his job, when he could fill a man's boots. He was a born range man. At sixteen he was as familiar with the technique of range work as any man.

Dick never was, never would be. He cared little about horses, less about cattle. If Dick had a gun to still-hunt deer and bighorn in the Bad Lands, a fly outfit to snare trout in the mountain streams, a book to read by the fire at night, he didn't care whether or how the Half Moon branded its calves or got its beef to market. Dick got no thrill out of galloping into a sunrise with riders thundering behind him like a troop of cavalry.

Yes, all this should have been by now under his direction. Instead, Duchain led the Half Moon riders. Ches felt his lip curl. He would never run the Half Moon. He had known that for some time. That privilege had been blown away in a fog of powder smoke four years earlier. But Duchain!

He stirred up his horse and rode down.

HIS FATHER sat in a deep chair on the broad veranda, a blue Russian boarhound stretched at his feet. Ches didn't need glasses to recognize old Ches. Old Ches and young Ches. Father and son. Four years had pried them as far apart as if they had been strangers. Farther. That was his father's favorite place and chair in midsummer. Ches expected to see him there, and there he was.

He was less prepared for the sight of the man he encountered at the wide door of a great barn. Not the sight of him, for he expected Dick to be there too. It was his appearance, the manifest change. He recalled Dick as an older edition of his own physical self, only with different ways, a different outlook. This man was thin faced, worried lines about his gray eyes, a sullen droop to his mouth. He glanced at Ches indifferently, nodded a greeting.

Ches waited until Dick tucked the last hitch in the latigo he tightened on a fidgety gray horse.

"Hello, Dick," he said.

Dick Williams turned, stared incredulously. Ches put out his hand.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

"Not to look at you. No, I wouldn't have. Only by your voice. I'd know that in the dark," Dick answered.

They looked at each other silently for a matter of seconds.

"I got to go," Dick said. "The Old Man's up at the house."

"What's the rush?" Ches asked. "You always used to have time to burn."

"There's always a rush around here, now," Dick replied fretfully. "You'll

find that out if you stay home. Why didn't you come back long ago?"

"That's a fool question," Ches returned, "considering the hullabaloo I stirred up around here four years ago. I was practically kicked out and told to stay out. I have no invitation to be here now."

Dick rubbed the reddish brown stubble on his chin.

"Oh, that," he said. "My private opinion is that you should have had a vote of thanks and been issued a license to kill off a few more undesirables."

"What does *he* think?" Ches inquired. "Still sore at me?"

Dick laid hold of his stirrup.

"I never know what he thinks about anything but my occasional mistakes," he said. "I only know what he does. When a man brings sons into the world, he might in fairness give them the benefit of the doubt now and then. But you'll have to tackle him without my moral support. I expect you can hold your own. You always could."

"Look here, Dick," Ches laid a restraining hand on the gray's bridle as Dick swung up. "You were always his favorite boy, even if I had it all over you as a cowman. If you can't hitch with him, I'm not likely to. I'm not here to ask anything of him anyway. This is my country. If I want to come back into it and stay in it, I will. But I mean to hold my own. And that's something you're concerned in as much as me."

"You mean the Rolling M and that Sun Prairie ranch?"

"What else?" Ches said. "I've paddled my own canoe for four years. If it was a question of asking anything of the family I wouldn't be here. But that outfit was left to us—you and me. I want control of my share. What do you want to do about your interest in it?"

Dick lifted his hat, settled it more firmly on his head, looked back at the house and that motionless figure in the chair, a small glimmer of white where the old head stood out against the brown wall.

"I sold my interest in Uncle Bill Oliver's estate to the Half Moon. The Old Man was the sole executor, if you recollect. You'll have to get an accounting from him."

"What in Sam Hill did you do that for?" Ches asked irritably. "Did you have to have the money to blow in?"

Dick shook his head.

"I've got most of it yet," he said. "He wanted the Sun Prairie ranch. He always gets what he wants, doesn't he?"

"Oh, I don't suppose it makes much difference," Ches murmured. "Only Uncle Bill wanted you and me to have that ranch. And I—oh, well."

Dick leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"I'll tell you something else you probably don't know," said he. "The Old Man incorporated the Half Moon. Under the law there has to be three shareholders to a corporation. There are one hundred shares. I own one share. Frank Duchain owns nine."

"That cheap blowhard!" Ches explained contemptuously. "Where did he ever get money to buy an interest in the Half Moon? Why, he never owned powder enough to blow him to hell."

"Well, there it is," Dick said. "Duchain cuts a lot of ice around here. Don't forget that."

"I'm having that fact impressed on me," Ches commented slowly. "If anybody asked me, I'd say the Half Moon had a very black nigger somewhere in the woodpile. I've been around Saco a day or two. Made some inquiries about Baldy Cooper. I hear things that don't exactly increase my respect for the Williams family—what's the matter with you?"

For Dick had flushed, a burning red that ran up into the roots of his brown hair.

"I don't know what you may have heard about that," he said. "But listen, Ches. Keep off Cooper when you talk to the Old Man. It makes him foam at the mouth."

"He probably will anyhow, when I make my presence known," Ches

remarked, "unless he's changed while I've been away."

"I don't know. He never mentions you," Dick replied. "I get sick of being a figurehead sometimes. Duchain runs the range and the Old Man runs the business end. Sometimes I wish I'd broke loose and pulled out like you did."

"Why don't you? Nobody's got any strings on you. You've got a stake."

"There's reasons," Dick said shortly. He tightened up his reins. "See you tonight."

He went loping down the creek, a ribbon of silver through green fields where the haying crew toiled. Ches left his horses standing by the stable door. He was not so sure he would be there at night when Dick returned. For the present . . .

HE SAUNTERED over to the house.

He climbed four steps to the veranda floor before that stocky figure in the chair made a move. Then old Ches knocked the ash off his cigar, ground the stub in an ash tray at his elbow and spoke to his son.

"Well," he grunted, "you're back at last, you young whelp."

Ches stiffened.

"I haven't called you names, dad," he said. "Don't take that high and mighty tone with me. It never did go, and it doesn't now."

"Think I'd fall on your neck?" his father demanded. "You make me a heap of trouble. Soon as you're clear of it, you drift. You lay low for four years, then turn up like a bad penny. By thunder, a fine pair of sons I raised!"

"It was your own doing. You didn't have to raise 'em," Ches retorted. "I didn't ask to be born. Nor—" He checked himself with a quick shrug of his shoulders.

He had always been a little afraid of his father. That subconscious resentment against a too dominant personality had made him to a certain degree defiant, a little unruly. That was why he had been known as the "rip-snorting Williams kid". But that was past. Strangely enough, he felt a little sorry for old Ches—without knowing why. He realized that he could no longer be blasted by his father's rages, his bitter way of speaking.

"I didn't come back to start an argument, dad," he said in a different tone. "For four years anyhow I have made you no worry or trouble, nor asked anything of you. It merely happens that I was born and grew up here. I took a hankering to ride across a country I knew. It did strike me that you might be glad to see me. I've sort of grown up, I think. I thought I might be some use to you."

"You got to be some use to yourself before you're any good to anybody else," his father flung at him.

"I am," Ches said calmly. "I have earned my own living for four years. I have not blowed in the money I earned. I've learned a few things here and there. I can go back any place I've been and folks would be glad to see me. So you might as well quit harping on that no-good string. If you prefer my room to my company we don't have to quarrel about that."

"I didn't say so," Williams senior muttered. "I raised you, such as you are. This is your home. You're welcome. But you got to take things as you find 'em."

"I haven't made any proposition to take anything," Ches answered, "only what rightfully belongs to me."

"You mean your interest in the Rolling M, I suppose," old Ches said. "I reckon that's what brought you back."

"Naturally," Ches admitted. "I don't see why I should overlook a stake that was bestowed on me by my own kin. But I would have come back anyway. I like this country. There's people in it I like, as well as some I don't."

"You'll get what's comin' to you," his father replied. "But things is different around the Half Moon than they were in your time. I had to re-organize myself. You went to hell. Dick's turned out a straw man. Folks I trusted went back

on me. I have had to protect my own interests. An' though I'm not so young as I used to be, you won't have no say around this outfit like maybe you'd expect."

Ches stared at his father. His tone had become querulous, complaining, altogether different from the savagery of his greeting, wholly at variance with the ruthless aggressive manner that had been the keynote of the man, that had made him feared and respected and successful.

"Yes, I know things are different," Ches said at last. "I stayed in Saco awhile. The outfit was shipping a herd. I expect your worthy range boss will be showing up here pretty soon. They were only a few miles behind me. *He's* enough to show me things are a heap different. It wouldn't do for me to be around the Half Moon much."

"That don't foller," Old Chess said. "Not if you want to stay home."

"Home hell!" young Ches broke out passionately. "I'll make my own home. Don't you think for a minute I can't. You figure I could stick around here and twiddle my thumbs? If I can't be useful to the outfit I can be useful to myself, as you put it awhile ago."

His father looked at him for a second. And when he spoke he amazed Ches alike by the difference in his tone and the thing his words expressed.

"Ches," he said. "I didn't aim to bawl at you the way I did when you come up. I've wished you'd come back many a time. I don't know why I acted hostile. I knew you were comin' because I've kept track of you. I just felt kinda stirred up and I had to blaze away like I used to do when you were a little kid. You were a rip-snorter from the time you could climb a horse. Now I'd like you to forget we were ever at loggerheads an' stand by me."

"Stand by you? Good Lord! Have you any reason to think I wouldn't, if you needed me?" Ches exclaimed. "What's come over you? You've got the world by the tail—have had for years. The Half Moon is cock of the walk in Vale County. If you feel you need me to stand by for anything, I'm here. But honestly, dad, I don't know how to take you. Recollect, you told me to get to hell out of your sight, after that trial. You repeated that with variations until I took you at your word."

"I know it, but I spent twenty thousand dollars to clear you, didn't I? You'd disobeyed me time an' again. I warned you particular to keep off Jess Ridley, to leave him alone an' let me deal with him. It seemed to me you'd just gone plumb bad. And—and, well, we'll let that pass. But while we're on the subject—it wasn't brought up at your trial because that trial was cooked and everybody knew it—just why did you deliberately go out of your way to tangle with Jess Ridley when I'd told you to lay off him, an' you'd promised you would?"

Ches smiled. Into his eyes came a curious glow. The corners of his mouth twisted a little as if something humorous, yet disturbing, stirred in his mind.

"Dad," he asked, "did you ever know me to lie to you—to anybody?"

The Old Man shook his head.

"No," he admitted. "Lyin' don't run in this family. I've never known either you or Dick to sidestep the truth. Me, when it's been necessary, I've always been able to hire my lyin' done by men that wasn't squeamish. I've had to use fire against fire once or twice in my time. Why?"

"Jess Ridley had it coming. He was pretty low, and he said things and did things a man shouldn't. Also he was a thief. You know all this."

"Yes. That's why I ordered you to walk away around him when you said you were going after him. I meant to squash him in my own way without you being mixed up in it. I knew there would be a heap of trouble if you tangled with him. And you let what I said go in one ear an' out the other."

"I didn't kill Ridley," Ches said softly. "I wasn't within thirty miles of where he was shot that day. I did obey you."

OLD CHES stared, incredulity in his keen old eyes, his white mustache suddenly bristling.

"But—but—" he spluttered—"why'n hell didn't you say so then?"

"Recall what happened," Ches warned. "I rode into Saco. I was arrested. Within ten minutes you got to me. You blew me high up and low down. But you ordered me to keep my mouth shut, admit nothing, say nothing. Remember? I have always done what you said as nearly as I could. I did then. I wasn't called to testify for myself at either the preliminary hearing or the trial. You had a flock of perjured witnesses—"

"Yes, an' I'd have 'em again," old Williams broke out passionately. "I'd buy all the liars and lawyers an' judges in the state if I had to, to clear one of my own kin!"

"Well we won't argue about that," Ches smiled. "But you can figure how it bewildered me—men testifying how Ridley jumped me and how I got him when we both drew to shoot it out, when I wasn't there at all."

"Outside of us," Williams Senior muttered, "Ridley had no enemies that I know of. Who shot him then?"

Ches bent toward him.

"You ought to know," he said harshly. "If you don't it's time you did. You know who shot Baldy Cooper, don't you? And why? I haven't been back here many days, but I'm not stupid. The same man that got Jess Ridley for a private grudge shot Baldy Cooper to make himself solid with the Half Moon. That's my hunch."

And then Ches stared with astonishment at his father. For the Old Man half rose from his chair. His face grew white. His mouth opened as if he struggled for utterance and the words strangled him. His hands jerked up and down, fists clenched.

"I don't believe you. I don't believe you!" he gasped. "It ain't so. Cooper turned thief. You don't know what you're talkin' about. You got it all wrong."

"All right, have it your way," Ches said. "I won't argue. I know what I know. Nothing will ever persuade me Baldy Cooper turned cow thief. Anybody sold you that idea had an ax to grind. Let's drop it, anyway. Let's talk about Uncle Bill Oliver's estate."

"Go get me a drink. There's whisky on the sideboard. I'm all shaky," old Ches answered then.

When Ches came back with a decanter and a glass the hand that poured the drink *was* shaky and a shadow Ches had never before seen clouded the old eyes. The liquor steadied old Ches a little. His son stood by silent, thinking. What was there in even the startling thing he had asserted to shock his father so? Old Chester Williams wasn't a tame man. By and large he had a reputation for hardness, for determination, that was justly earned. Perhaps, Ches thought with a touch of pity, he *did* feel his years. Yet he looked as grim, as tough fibered, as of old.

"There's no use us harpin' on that string," the Old Man muttered. "You jarred me all right. Forget it. That's all ancient history. Let's have a new deal. What do you want to do, now you're back?"

"You said awhile ago you wanted me to stand by you," Ches said. "I'm willing, if you are. I only see one way of doing that. If you kept track of me as you say you did, you know I'm a cowman. I ran a wagon for the Arrow Syndicate on the Colorado line last fall and this spring. Put Duchain in the discard and let me handle the range for you."

Old Ches shook his head. If it hadn't been an unthinkable conclusion young Ches, watching closely for his response, would have said his father looked afraid.

"No," he muttered. "I can't do that."

"You mean you won't," Ches commented. "All right. I've no hankering to be a guest around here. Nor a figurehead. You've only one job I can do right. You refuse me that. So I'll take over my share in Uncle Bill's estate that you've had charge of and I'll go on my own."

CHAPTER IV

PROPOSAL AND REFUSAL

CHES came back to Saco driving before him a bunch of horses with a Rolling M on the left shoulder of each. They were good looking beasts, fat and sleek as house cats. Bull MacCormack eyed them appreciatively, milling in the corral behind the big barn he tended.

"Taken to rustlin' for your start in life?" he drawled. "Many's the ambitious young feller gone wrong over horses."

Ches swung out of his saddle. He had his hand to the plow and characteristically he did not hesitate to turn his own furrow. He disregarded Bull's left handed inquiry, having one of his own to make.

"You work for wages, don't you, Bull?" he asked.

"Well, I got to do something for a livin' besides paw an' beller," MacCormack responded.

"Got any ambition to be a ranch boss?"

"I got ambitions to be anything that means more money," Bull observed thoughtfully. "So far, northern Montana hasn't lifted up no loud cry for me to take over no great undertakin's."

"Would you go out as a ranch boss for me?" Ches asked. "I don't know what you get here, but I'll pay you a darned sight more."

"Not for the Half Moon—no," Bull growled deep in his barrel chest.

"No. For me—myself. I'm starting on my own, slick and clean."

"That's different. I guess I could stand it if you could."

"Can you throw up this job on short notice?" Ches inquired.

"I couldn't leave Ben Harper in the lurch," Bull protested. "Even to take on a good thing."

"I guess we could manage that," Ches replied. "I know Ben. I need you worse than he does. I'll speak to him. And I'll come over and talk turkey to you after supper."

He stalked away to Sam's Place. Instead of Vinnie Cooper behind the counter a sallow youth waited on him. Ches didn't linger over his food this time. Once as the proprietor passed him he turned on his stool to ask—

"Miss Cooper not on the job today?"

"Scalded her hand an' had to lay off," Scott grunted.

"Oh. Too bad. Wonder where I could find her?"

"Over to Bull MacCormack's. She lives with them."

"Thanks."

Ches went back to the livery stable. So Vinnie lived with the MacCormacks. Bull hadn't mentioned that. Evidently he didn't always talk too much.

"Where's your place, Bull?" he asked. "I understand Vinnie Cooper lives with you. I want to see her."

Bull stepped out of the door. He pointed to a small weather-beaten frame house at the far end of Saco's single street.

"That there's my domicile," he said. Then he looked curiously at Ches.

"Young Mister Williams," he drawled, "I dunno's I got any call to put a bug in your ear. But if you're goin' to my house, you might as well know my wife is old Baldy Cooper's niece. She's got a notion—for which I don't altogether blame her—that your folks sort of gave her uncle a mite the worst of it, one way an' another. She mightn't be awful polite to you. I dunno. Women are funny."

"My business," Ches said gently, "is with Vinnie Cooper. And I'm not the Half Moon. I never was. I'm myself. Neither Baldy Cooper nor anybody else got the worst of it from me, unless they got it coming. I think Vinnie *sabes* that much. If your wife don't, maybe by and by it'll be clear to her."

"Good luck to you," Bull replied. "I'm with you, kid. I like your style. You got Frank Duchain sized up an' that's a recommend to me. But the wife's a Cooper—a Texas Cooper—an' they're grudge holders from the ground up."

"I'll take a chance," Ches said, over his shoulder.

BUT HE was not that evening to draw Mrs. MacCormack's fire. A plot of grass on the east side of the house, shaded from the bright beams of a lowering sun, held Vinnie Cooper in a homemade lounge chair. One bandaged hand rested in her lap. Ches turned in there without ceremony.

"Hello Vin," he greeted. "How's the damaged flipper?"

"Sore." She looked up with a faint smile. "I won't be able to work for three weeks."

"Rest'll do you good," he said. "Only it isn't pleasant to be crippled in order to take life easy. Say, Vin, you fell heir to that ranch Baldy had out in the Larb Hills, didn't you?"

She nodded. Ches didn't miss the shadow that crossed her face.

"Did you ever sell it or do anything with it?" he continued. "Anybody got any sort of claim to it, or is it altogether in your hands?"

"It's mine," Vinnie murmured. "It just stands there deserted. They couldn't steal that. It couldn't vanish like our cattle. Why don't you ask what became of them?"

"Some of these times maybe I'll find that out without asking anybody," Ches said slowly. "It seems like quite a lot of funny things has happened since I went away. We'll talk about that some other time. Right now I'm interested in that Larb Hill ranch of yours because I want to use it. Will you give me a five-year lease of that property, Vin?"

"I wouldn't give the Half Moon a pleasant smile," Vinnie muttered. "I wouldn't give them the satisfaction of having the right to walk across a single foot of ground my father owned. No. Not for all the money they've got."

"I'm not the Half Moon, Vin," he said patiently. "Nor is it likely I'll ever have anything to do with the Half Moon. I might even find myself in the position of locking horns with my own folks, if some of the people connected with the Half Moon can swing things their way. But the reason I want that ranch of yours is because I'm starting on my own, and I've got to have a headquarters.

"You know that Uncle Bill Oliver left the Rolling M—lock, stock and barrel—to me and Dick. Dick sold out his share to the Old Man. I'm taking my interest out of the hands of the Half Moon entirely. But the Old Man doesn't want to let go the Rolling M ranch on Sun Prairie. I can't force him to. He's land crazy. So I've got cattle and horses, but no ranch. I'm strictly on my own. I don't fit into the Half Moon. I don't like the way things shape up around home. The range is wide open, yet, though. And if I had that place of yours in the Larb I could get my outfit started right. I was always your friend, Vin. You don't class me with the enemy, do you?"

Vinnie didn't answer the last question directly. She studied his face a minute, searchingly.

"I don't think there's room in Vale County for another cow outfit," she observed.

Ches shrugged his shoulders.

"I own quite a bunch of cattle, and horses to handle 'em," he said quietly. "I'll *make* room for myself."

"You'll have a tough time of it," she said. "The Half Moon runs this country. There are other outfits, but they follow the Half Moon's lead. And Duchain runs the Half Moon. He doesn't like you. Why on earth did you declare war on him as soon as you came back?"

"I didn't," Ches denied.

"It amounts to that."

Again Ches shrugged his shoulders. He poked at the grass with his bootheel.

"Never mind Frank Duchain," he said mildly. "Let's leave him out of it until he pokes his nose in—if he does. What about that ranch of yours? I'll give you a fair price for a five-year lease. It shouldn't lay idle. Only go to rack. I can make good use of it, and you can make use of the money. We both benefit.

Go on, Vin, make a deal with me."

"All right," the girl said. "Although I don't know why I should trust you any more than any other Williams."

"You got to trust people," Ches told her. "You can't get along in this world without taking people more or less on trust. Only not too much. Maybe all the Williams family aren't so black as they're painted. I've got something of a bad name, myself, but I notice people generally overlook that once they get to know me. Say, isn't there a train east to Glasgow this evening, sometime?"

"In about half an hour."

Ches rose, put out his hand.

"Shake on the bargain," said he. "I'm off to the county seat. "I'll look up the legal description of what land you hold along Blacktail, and I'll have a formal lease drawn up, so if anything *should* happen to me, you'll be sure of your part of it. I'll pay you a darned sight more per year for the use of it than you'll ever make working in anybody's restaurant."

"That'll be fine," Vinnie smiled. "Maybe you'd give me a job as cook, too."

Ches had half turned to go. He came back to her. A queer sort of light began to glow and burn in his gray eyes. He bent, putting both hands on her shoulders, staring into her upturned face, which itself mirrored surprise.

"I'll give you a job for life, Vin," he whispered tensely, "and it won't include cooking—unless I go broke in the cow business. I guess it was you as much as the Rolling M that brought me back—only I didn't know it till just now. Will you have me, Vin?"

She pushed his hands away roughly, shook her head.

"I can't," she said. "You know I can't."

"Shucks!" he exclaimed. "What's got into people? I ask dad to do something and all he says is 'I can't!' Him that never knew the meaning of the word 'can't'. Now you. Why *can't* you?"

"Well, I won't, then!" she flashed. "You'd know why, if you had any sense."

"Well, if you put it that way, it's different," Ches agreed. "I don't beg nothing off anybody. But I always wanted you, Vin. You know that."

"As a friend—yes," the girl murmured. "Nothing more. There can't be."

"Well, we're still friends," Ches assured her. "I may be sudden but I ain't no fool. So long, Vin. See you tomorrow."

DURING the half hour before the eastbound came through Saco Ches talked rapidly and earnestly to Bull MacCormack in the saddle room. Sitting in the day coach, the car wheels clacking on rail joints all the way to the county seat, he gave himself up to a frowning consideration of ways and means, and if the fabric of a dream intruded now and then, Ches Williams was like other young men. He had more chambers than one in his mind. He could see pictures of Vinnie Cooper at times. Other times he saw herds under his own brand and riders following him recklessly. Sun and storm, spring greenness, the parched heat of August, the white blanket of winter on the range—a continuance of the panorama he had known and been part of since he could remember. But with this difference, that now he was consciously ordering his own destiny insofar as a man may. He could imagine high rewards along a road beset with difficulties.

And there would be difficulties along any road he chose to walk in that territory where the Half Moon dominated. The inimical atmosphere was intangible, but it was there. It was not altogether intangible. There was something to the whispers Ches heard here and there.

The smugly arrogant face of Frank Duchain rose before his mental eyes. Something had given a new twist to Half Moon affairs. It wasn't *his* business. Yet he knew instinctively that if any one of the blind leads ahead opened up, he would make it his business. Men like Baldy Cooper didn't die with their boots on for no reason. Men like Frank

Duchain didn't acquire a valuable property interest merely as a generous gift—not from a cattle king who had never surrendered a jot of his power or possessions to any one, not even to his sons, without value received.

An old saying recurred to Ches, one he had heard his father quote, "Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you." And as the train drew into Glasgow he shrugged his shoulders and dismissed these sinister tinged imponderables from his mind.

CHAPTER V

THE PINK CHEEKED BOY

CHES watched a string of four-horse teams kick up a tail of white dust across the alkali bottoms south of Saco. Bull MacCormack drove in the lead; seven or eight men perched on the other wagons. The deep boxes of all were packed with tools and machinery and grub. Mowers and rakes dangled in a string from each tail-gate. In three days that gang would be cutting hay, repairing fences, corrals, making livable the long abandoned quarters of the Double C, which had been Baldy Cooper's brand. That silent ranch on Blacktail would echo voices and laughter again.

He had been lucky to get labor. Would he be equally lucky at surrounding himself with able riders? Ches wondered. Two men had promised. He needed one more. He could use half a dozen.

As if in answer to that thought a voice sounded at his elbow speaking his name. Ches turned to stare into the blue eyes of a youth his own age or thereabout, a slender wisp of a boy.

"I hear you need riders," he said.

"I do," Ches replied.

He looked more appraisingly. Worn spurs hung at the youngster's bootheels. He was armed and his belt had seen service as well as his boots. For the rest, he was decently clad. Ches got an impression of competence beyond his years. And after all, that impression of extreme youth came mostly from slimness and fair coloring. There were little lines about this young man's eyes that meant a lot of looking into the eye of the sun and the teeth of the plains wind.

"You *sabe* range work, I suppose?"

"Raised at it."

Ches hauled out his notebook.

"You're on the Rolling M payroll. What'll I call you?"

"Mike." A tentative hesitation. "Mike Stratton."

"If the Doyle boys, who promised to show up this morning, arrive, we'll light out," Ches informed him, "for the Half Moon roundup. You got a mount and a pack *caballo* to carry your bed, Mike?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because you'll need your own mount till we catch the roundup. All my horses are there."

Stratton nodded understanding.

"I'll be around on the street any time you want to start," he said. "My horses are in the stable here."

Ches more or less mechanically kept step with him as far as the Harper House. He planted himself in a chair by a poker table and covered a sheet of paper with little groups and rows of figures.

An hour passed. Two. It neared noon. Ches went out and stared up and down the shining bands of steel that ran east and west from Saco till they dwindled to nothing. North and south one or two dim rutted trails traversed the sagebrush and the alkali flats. All empty space. No riders. Nothing moved. Saco was dead, lacking only decent burial, and the surrounding plains were as devoid of life as the town itself, sweltering under a brassy sun in a hollow immensity of silence.

The hotel gong clanged raucously. Out of various places about the hotel men sauntered into the dining room. Ches joined them. Sam's Place had no lure for him since Vinnie Cooper scalded her hand. In either place eating was a business conducted with despatch rather than ceremony.

Ches emerged to find two fairly tall

dark skinned men dismounting before the Ark, the nearest saloon. Between dust and tan and the natural tint of their skin they looked like mulattos or half-breed Indians. But they were as white as Ches Williams himself, Texans of Irish extraction, and he had known them both since childhood.

" 'Lo, Ches. Come on have a bottle of beer."

Ches shook his head.

"I'm on the water wagon for a while," said he. "Get your beer and your dinner and we'll split the breeze."

They vanished within to wet their parched throats, reappeared and jogged their horses over to the livery stable, after which they strolled leisurely to the restaurant. By the time they returned Ches was saddled and packed. Mike Stratton had his rig on a bright sorrel horse, his bed lashed on a glossy black. His riding gear was ornate, hand carved, silver trimmed. They waited for the laggards.

"Burn the earth, you two highbinders," Ches commanded the Doyle brothers with the liberty of lifelong acquaintance, "or we'll be making a dry camp tonight on the edge of Sun Prairie."

"You're goin' to be a plumb hard man to work for, I see that," Bob Doyle mourned, with a flicker in his eye. "I kain't stand bein' hurried, Ches. Never could. Gits me all flustered. Then I ain't worth a whoop at nothin'. You got to make allowance for me. Gittin' old an' feeble. But I do the best I can—so long as I ain't rushed off my feet."

Ches grinned. The Doyles were around thirty. If there were riders swifter with noose and branding iron, with more initiative and wider range experience, they were not at large in that region.

THEY crossed the railroad, bore south over a wide sagebrush bottom, over the same alkali flats where the Rolling M ranch crew had flaunted a banner of dust that morning. When Saco grew a dim huddle with the dark line of Milk River lying like a giant rope carelessly looped across the landscape, they turned southeast, rode up over a rolling country that levelled out eventually to an immense plateau, from the middle of which the eye could not reach to the outer rim. Small depressions threaded this even surface, and along each watered course cattle grazed, thousands of near and distant fly specks on an enormous billiard table, the cloth whereof was a smooth stretch of sun bleached grass.

Far off a cluster of objects larger than grazing stock took form when the afternoon waned. They rode on and on, like small boats at sea which, however powerfully stroked by oars, seem to get nowhere. By degrees the huddle became outlined buildings, and the land surrounding shone green instead of sun bleached gray and yellow. Off on the southern skyline the Larb Hills began to lift tremendous blunt topped knobs.

Ches and the Doyles gazed longingly at those far hills, knowing their cool spring fed hollows, the shady thickets of wild plum and serviceberry. Mike Stratton rode wordless and expressionless. His lips were as dry as theirs, but he did not curse the heat. If he knew anything about Sun Prairie he did not mention the fact. He sat straight in his saddle, his bright sorrel horse stepping as if on springs.

Ches looked at him once and said to himself—

"That kid's a rider."

Ed Doyle looked at him once and said with a grin:

"Kid, it's a wild life we lead. How can you stand all this here excitement?"

And the boy's lips parted in a smile that briefly transformed his face for a second before it set back in sober lines.

The sun dipped. That withering heat passed before a cooling air out of the west. In the dusk they rode into the ranch which had loomed before them for so long. The ranch Uncle Bill Oliver had created out of a creek and a stretch of raw prairie and passed on to Ches and Dick. Here old Uncle Bill had died

quietly in his bed. Here Baldy Cooper had taken his last breath with the echo of a gun in his ears.

The Half Moon had a haying crew at the Rolling M. The cook fed Ches and his riders. They made their beds in the open away from the gabble of the laborers in the bunkhouse.

Ches looked up at the stars while his companions snored. His uncle had made this ranch out of nothing in two decades. It controlled meadows and water rights and range ample for ten thousand cattle. A childless man, he had left it all to children. Life was funny, Ches reflected. Old Ches Williams had always wanted the Rolling M and now he had it. Cattle were nothing. They could be bought in swarms; they would grow. A ranch had to be made. Fertile land endured forever, continually replenishing itself.

Still, although the ground he lay on should have been his and was not, Ches felt grateful to old Uncle Bill Oliver. Only for that bequest he would still be a rider holding or seeking a job.

Remembering that Baldy Cooper had been killed here kept Ches awake longer. No one knew who killed Cooper, nor why, and that was a rare thing in the cow country, where personal collisions were common enough and were seldom touched with mystery. Old Baldy crooked? Ches' lip curled. The fools and their foolish whispering. Couldn't they tell a man when they saw one?

AT SUNRISE they were up, breakfasted and away. By ten in the forenoon a cloud of dust lifted on the southern edge of Sun Prairie where the level sward began to fall away in a confusion of sharp edged gorges down to the Missouri river. So they came finally to the Half Moon roundup on a narrow plateau between great color banded walls of earth on the edge of the Bad Lands. Sagebrush began here and scattered clumps of scrubby pine and mats of juniper. Here the Half Moon had bunched a thousand cattle from that morning's ride. They walked in a circle, bawling, kicking up dust, trampling a scanty vegetation into the parched soil.

Half a dozen men held the roundup. Duchain and the rest were roping fresh horses to work the herd when Ches rode into the camp. He nodded curtly, went on saddling his mount.

"Well, here we are," Ches said. "Four good men and true. The Big Chief sent you word to hold everything that carries the Rolling M?"

"He did." Duchain grunted.

"We'll get ourselves mounted and lend a hand," Ches continued.

He swung down, motioned his men to unsaddle. They undid their *reatas*. Each shook out a loop.

"Where's your string?" Duchain asked.

"In your *remuda*," Ches replied. "You have a right smart sprinkling of Rolling M ponies. We're going to ride *them*."

"That's a hell of a note," Duchain complained. "I wasn't told about that. Every man in my crew is ridin' two or three Rollin' M's. You can't set us afoot thataway."

"Can't I?" Ches stepped close to Duchain and lowered his voice, for all his words were acidly polite. "The Half Moon pastures are full of Half Moon saddle stock and they're only fifteen miles away. Don't make any mistake, Duchain. From now on Rolling M horses will be mounted by Rolling M men only. *Sabe?*"

Duchain's face turned dull red. Ches stood smiling. Then the man shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess we can manage," he said. "Same time, if you're goin' to ride with this roundup, Ches, we'll work smoother if you take that chip off'n your shoulder. You don't have to act as if you were on the prod when you're around me, just because you don't like me."

"Who said I didn't like you?" Ches demanded. "Why, I love you like some men love their brothers. Everybody on the Half Moon range likes you, Frank. What's more, they respect you. You're away off about me carrying a chip on my shoulder around you. Why, say, any

time I act as if I had a chip on my shoulder I give you leave to shoot it off. Well, come on, you three waddys, and we'll see what sort of stock we have to ride."

He didn't wait for Duchain to reply. With his last word he turned his back on the Half Moon range boss and walked into the single rope enclosure that held the *remuda* together. It was strung like a big diamond from the two wheels of the bed wagon. Across its mouth the horse wrangler manipulated the loose rope that served as a gate. It looked a slender fence to hold two hundred spirited beasts, but no range horse will jump a rope held above the level of his knees.

Ches, Mike Stratton and the two Doyles walked into the center of the slowly revolving mass of horseflesh. They stood in a compact group.

"Sweet baby boy Williams," Ed Doyle murmured. "You aim to incite this Duchain person to homicide? Or is that your way of joshin'? Where'd you learn it? Down in Colorado?"

"Don't talk foolish," Ches grinned. "Flip your twine on that bay."

Both Doyles captured Rolling M's. As the herd circled, wary of those flashing rawhide loops that meant bits in their mouths and spurs in their ribs, two black Rolling M's surged past.

"Take the first one," Ches told Stratton.

Mike's noose whistled. Ches dropped his loop over the second black's neck. They led them out to where their saddles lay.

Already Half Moon riders were mounted and galloping to relieve the men on herd. Duchain stood rolling a cigaret, his face a blank. Ches busied himself saddling. He was thinking, with a degree of satisfaction, that his riders would be well mounted. He had spotted at least forty head of Rolling M saddle horses in the *remuda*. He had always known that Uncle Bill prided himself on his horseflesh, that he bred better stock than the Half Moon.

He turned at a sharp sentence. Long haired Mose had come in, pulled up his sweaty horse near Mike Stratton to snarl—

"Who in hell told you you could put your rig on *that* horse?"

It wasn't the words themselves; there were teeth in the man's tone. Stratton was taking the last hitch in his latigo. Deliberately he unhooked the stirrup from the horn, gave his saddle a tentative shake. He didn't even look over his shoulder.

Long haired slipped out of his saddle like a lean cat. Ches watched, alert, curious, anticipatory. Duchain stood twenty feet away, heard and saw, but made no move, nor lifted his voice in explanation. Ches didn't overlook the significance of that. And the long haired one bellowed at Stratton a second time.

The boy's face darkened like a thunder cloud. He hunched forward. His arms bent a little at the elbows, drew away from his sides. He didn't open his mouth. But he moved slowly forward until he stood within five feet of Mose.

"You misbegotten cross between a female coyote and a sheepherder," he said very slowly and deliberately through set teeth, "talk like a white man when you speak to me. Or do your talkin' with your gun. You hear me?"

They matched stares for twenty seconds. Then Mose looked away from Stratton. He ran his tongue over dry lips, glanced aside at Duchain, at Ches, at two or three Half Moon men sitting their horses. And one of these, holding tight rein on a restive gray, suddenly broke the preternatural gravity of his face to snicker aloud at the long haired one's palpable discomfiture.

Long haired Mose mumbled something. His lids blinked rapidly as if the sun suddenly hurt his eyes. He turned away, began fumbling at the latigo of his saddle. And Stratton didn't alter that tensity, that attitude of being a spring coiled for a lightning release, until Mose took his rope in hand and went into the corral to catch a fresh horse.

Then he straightened up, reached for

his cigaret material, unmoved, unshaken, impassive.

Ches walked over to Duchain.

"You're boss of this outfit," he said shortly. "I'd suggest you explain to your men about these Rolling M horses—unless you want to find yourself short-handed."

"I expect I better," Duchain agreed. "I didn't expect Mose to get red eyed about it like that. That was one of his pet mounts. Still, seems to me that kid is kinda quick on the trigger."

"Mose appeared to think so too," Ches responded dryly.

Duchain grinned, but it was a feeble attempt. He was boiling inside and Ches Williams knew it, and was secretly amused. Duchain could have checked his long haired man Friday. He had let it go to an issue, and Mose had dodged the issue by pulling in his horns.

TEN MINUTES later they went loping out to the roundup. Ches fell in beside Stratton. The Doyles flanked him, four Rolling M riders in a row. Gradually they dropped a few paces behind the Half Moon crew.

"Listen, you fellows," Ches said. "We ain't popular here. Watch your P's and Q's. You especially, Mike. Don't start anything if you can help it. I need you for punching cows, not for making war."

"I take orders from you," young Stratton said grimly. "But I don't take nothin' off anybody else, any time, anywhere."

"Well, you didn't, and probably you won't ever need to," Ches grinned. "So let her go as she lays."

Stratton pulled his hat a shade lower over his eyes and looked straight ahead, swinging easy to the plunging lope of his horse, as if he had dismissed that matter finally.

"Kid's dynamite, if I know anything," Ed Doyle said to Ches out of one corner of his mouth. "Glad I come along. Goin' to have touches of high life on this man's roundup. Like old times. Twenty minutes in camp an' you run a sandy on Duchain and Mike buffaloes old Long Hair. Duchain was all set to stand by, mum while Mose runs it all over this pink cheeked boy of ours. Say, they sure love each other, some of this Half Moon crew. Notice that feller give Mose the ha-ha? This is goin' to be more fun than a three ring circus."

Ches nodded. He wasn't so sure he agreed with Ed Doyle's definition of fun. But he was quite sure that any potential bad actor in the Half Moon would step warily around this slim blue eyed boy on his left. And somehow that filled Ches with a peculiar sort of satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

MIKE STRATTON, the two Doyles and two Half Moon riders, under Ches Williams' direction, pushed nine hundred head of Rolling M cattle into the Larb foothills one day when August had been replaced by September. Yet there was no abatement of the fierce heat that seared the plains. The cattle trailed off a bench into the course of Blacktail to plunge their muzzles thirstily in cool water flowing between brush screened banks. Above the brush, wild plums lifted angular branches. The six riders plucked the red and yellow fruit without dismounting and sucked the sweet juices gratefully.

"You fellows catch the roundup. I'm going up to the ranch," Ches said at last.

From the creek rim he watched them go. Below the horizon the Half Moon moved south with two thousand beef cattle. Ches twisted in his saddle, resting one hand on the sleek rump of his horse. So far twelve hundred Rolling M cattle had been thrown in on the reaches of Blacktail. For a little while Ches sat there pondering on his work, making tentative plans.

"I'll certainly have to find out something about that Three Link brand," he muttered. "In fact I'm beginning to think there's quite a lot I ought to look

into. And some of my inquiries aren't going to be taken kindly by some people I know."

If only Dick wasn't so useless, so apathetic. If Duchain hadn't managed to make himself a sort of right bower to old Ches Williams, who had never in his life regarded any man as indispensable. Ches had a feeling that the cards were stacked.

Duchain was competent enough on the range. Ches admitted that grudgingly. But he was—well, Ches wouldn't put his thoughts into definite form. He shrugged his shoulders and rode on.

Five miles brought him to upper Blacktail. Scattered pines stood like a thin beard on the hills above. The creek bottom was like a small valley. The old Cooper place hugged the channel of Blacktail, a clean hill stream, ten feet wide on pebbly shallows singing between flats of wild hay.

Ches knew every foot of that creek and its tributaries. He turned aside into a hollow once and halted by a wild strawberry patch with a reminiscent smile. But he didn't dismount to pick a single one of those red rubies peeping from beneath green leaves. The last time he came by there he and Vinnie stripped those vines together, two careless children just turned seventeen. And he had burned the earth to Saco that night to be taken by a deputy sheriff for shooting Jess Ridley.

Well, that was long ago, and if the powder fog of that shooting had swallowed him up for four years, at least he was back in his own country. Not as he had hoped to be, the mainstay of the Half Moon. The Rolling M was his own, but it was small potatoes compared to his natural heritage. No man likes to lead a corporal's guard when he should be a brigade commander—like Frank Duchain. And again Ches Williams' lip curled.

At any rate, without any suspicion of sentiment, yielding to an obscure impulse, he let the strawberry patch go undespoiled until Vinnie Cooper should help him pluck the red berries again; and so he rode on to his ranch.

THE CREW was in for noon. Bull MacCormack met him, haled him into the house. The cook set out food. Bull straddled a chair and smoked, giving account of his stewardship.

"We're throwin' up lots of hay. Patched some fence. Place goes to hell quick when it's abandoned. Lots of work needed around here."

"Get any more Rolling M horses from the Half Moon ranch?" Ches inquired.

"About sixty head. Mostly saddle stock."

Ches walked about the place with Bull for a few minutes.

"I'll try to dig up some more men for you," he said finally. "You send in a four-horse team for a load of lumber. I'll try to hire a carpenter. This house wants fixing and the stable, too."

"Sure does," Bull agreed. "Barrin' a little disrepair she's a peach of a location, though. Cooper knew a ranch when he saw one. If you'd use all this water on the flats another year you could grow hay to winter six thousand calves. Makin's of a real ranch."

It had, Ches reflected, when Bull and his men went out with rattling hayracks and mowers clattered across the fields. Why couldn't Baldy Cooper have lived to enjoy quiet possession of this pleasant spot after giving more than a decade of loyal service to the Half Moon? Perhaps he, Ches Williams, himself might not enjoy quiet possession.

Ches nursed his chin in one hand and stared about the bald room where his cook had set up a range. A long table of rough boards covered with oilcloth stood along the wall with benches for men to sit on. Canned stuff was piled on shelves, stood in cases on the floor. Ches recalled it as a homelike living room, elk and bighorn antlers over a fireplace that yawned empty now. There were Navajo rugs underfoot and comfortable chairs to sit in. It had always seemed to have a far more homelike atmosphere than the

big house at the Half Moon, he couldn't tell why. He remembered and missed that peculiar essence.

Rising from his seat he prowled through the rooms. The house was solidly built of pine logs. Here was Vinnie's room and there her father's, and yonder the ample bunk room where stray riders slept when they passed that way, littered now with the scanty beds of the haydiggers unrolled on the bare floor.

"Have to get some furniture and make this place look like something, soon as the rush is over," Ches muttered. "Looks like a barn right now."

Then he went out to where there had once been a small enclosed garden at the chimney end of the house. He looked down at the remains of a few rosebushes that had been Vinnie's pride, now trampled shapeless by wild cattle invading that deserted home through breached fences.

"Gosh darn it all, anyway!

Ches didn't know why he uttered that sentence, which had all the force of an oath, nor why the sight of a solitary La France rose on a drooping stem made him feel a little sad.

Half an hour later he was loping across the low rolling foothills, dropping down toward Sun Prairie on a fresh horse, driving thirty saddle horses out of the pasture before him. He looked back once from the rim of the creek. Blue above, gray green below, threaded by a glittering stream. The plains spread north like an endless scroll whereon men wrote their little destinies, horse, foot and gun. Cattle and horses and the despised sheep flocks. Other men rooting for gold ore in the bowels of the Little Rockies standing like a row of purple cones forty miles west, standing up like a barrier behind the broad acres of the Half Moon.

When Baldy Cooper died he had between five and six hundred head of cattle, the fruit of his savings, ranging under the Double C. Now his daughter worked in a hash-house for ten dollars a week. What was the answer?

"They killed him and stole everything he had."

Ches recalled Vinnie's low toned sentence, the bitterness in her voice. They? They? He remembered, too that Three Link cow in a roundup on the head of the Dom Pedro. Conjecture and suspicion sharpened by a profound dislike were his constant companions.

Ches distrusted appearances. Appearances had very nearly sent him to the penitentiary once. At seventeen appearances had branded him as a killer. Appearances had brought an open rupture with his father. So he discounted somewhat the shadow and substance of circumstantial evidence.

But he believed that appearances, however fantastic, however incredible, had given him the key to a riddle. He had been turning that over in his mind for three days or more. He was still pondering certain shadowy suspicions that seemed to involve himself, Vinnie Cooper, the Half Moon and certain persons as yet unknown, when he rode into the Half Moon camp at sundown.

CHAPTER VII

BAG OF WIND

CHES carried to Saco a letter from Bull MacCormack to his wife. The Half Moon broke its last camp. The herd moved like an earthbound cloud across the dusty flat to be sorted by age and sex near the stockyards. The long siding lay full of slatted cars. Two locomotives snorted jets of white steam. All that men in far towns might have porterhouse steak and beef stew, to the satisfaction of their hunger and the profit of the cattle barons.

But Ches did not work on the fringe of that mass of cattle. He rode to town and he took Mike Stratton with him. He liked this slim, fair haired, exceedingly silent and competent youth, and there was a lot of tension in the Half Moon camp. Ches was sensitive to atmospheres. He knew his people and his time. Mose Crane sulked and snarled at his fellow riders. Some of them salted the

wound Mike had made in the long haired one's self-esteem.

Ches took occasion to warn Stratton again as they jogged into Saco. There would be a lot of Dutch courage released from bottles of Bourbon whisky when the herd was loaded and the crew took a fling in town. But he might as well have whistled up the wind. Mike looked at him unmoved.

"I won't go out of my way to start anything. But I certainly won't sidestep him if *he* aims to. Would you? What's your anxiety to preserve this long haired tarantula?"

"I have designs on him myself," Ches said quietly. "But I want him alive. I think I will have a use for him by and by."

"Then you better see that he lays off'n me," Mike stated. "Because I have no use for him a-tall. He's the kind of soup bone I can crack without losin' any sleep whatever."

Ches had to let it go at that. He couldn't direct the course of private quarrels. No man could in that country. It wasn't done. So they crossed the track and stabled their horses. There Ches learned that his father and Dick were in town.

He turned in to the hotel and Mike went his way. Afterward Ches wondered what was the use of yielding now and then to the clan impulse, of waving even a tentative olive branch at his own kin. Old Ches sat in the office, a cigar jutting like a rusty pistol barrel beneath his long white mustache. He uttered only monosyllabic grunts. Dick said even less. There was a cloud over them both that darkened the sun of geniality, and Ches went away depressed and resentful, to deliver his letter.

The tiny woman who came to the door startled him. She might have been a miniature edition of Vinnie Cooper, so similar was she in feature and coloring. In height Vinnie came to Ches' shoulder, but this diminutive person could walk under his outstretched arm. Ches smiled at her not so much in friendliness as at the notion of her being a mate to Bull MacCormack, who was himself five inches taller than Ches and half as thick again through the shoulders.

But no answering gleam lighted Mrs. MacCormack's face. She knew him, Ches felt; remained hostile although he was her husband's employer—because he was a Williams of the Half Moon and the shadow of that crescent lay over her uncle's memory.

She took the letter with brief thanks.

"How's Vinnie's scalded hand?" he asked.

"Better." Tone and answer were alike curt.

"Is she in? Wonder if I could see her?"

"She is, but she's busy," Mrs. MacCormack stated.

A rebuff from a woman angers some men, dismays others. Ches strode along the planked sidewalk with his head in the air. He wasn't to blame for being the son of his father, who had always taken what he wanted with little regard for other people's feelings. *He* wasn't like that. A woman's hostility troubled Ches far more than the active enmity of any man ever could. Still, Mrs. Bull was a Cooper. Probably any of the Coopers—and they were a numerous clan in the Southwest—would declare war on sight if they believed the Half Moon responsible for Baldy's death. All but Vinnie. She knew him too well. That comforted Ches. He would see her in good time.

Saco was barren of anything to stir his interest. He didn't care to try breaking through the stone wall of his father's brooding or Dick's strange sullenness. So he went across to the station and sent sundry telegrams to the county seat concerning labor and a carpenter, and wired a man he knew in a cow town sixty miles west to find him four more riders if he could. There were none footloose in Saco. The Half Moon on the south, the Circle Diamond and the Ragged H on the north, had every available cowpuncher on their payrolls.

When he had done that he strolled about looking for Mike Stratton. The Half Moon herd was crawling up to the

yards. Ches was more or less indifferent to what Duchain thought, but it was proper for him to be on hand and hold up his end when that herd was trimmed for shipping. He had a couple of hundred beeves of his own he wanted to see in cars. It would take the lion's share of his first year's sales to put his ranch in shape and carry his payroll till next season.

He saw Mike's horse in the street. He looked in all the saloons, but Mike frequented none of the usual haunts. Ches looked into the hotel again. Old Ches sat in the same chair. Dick stared frowning at the floor. Ches withdrew. From the far end of the street, from the vicinity of Bull MacCormack's house, Mike suddenly appeared.

They mounted and rode out to camp, changed horses, ate, descended with the rest upon that uneasy herd of longhorns. In swirls of dust, amid scurrying hoofs, in swift wordless action they sorted out steers, cows, Half Moons, Rolling M's, a sprinkling of stray brands, each in separate groups. And with the sorting done, they moved each group into the loading pens, up the chutes in a steady stream.

Toward evening the last car-door clanged shut, the last train drew clear. The cowpuncher had done his job. The rest was for railroads and stock commissioners and abattoirs—ultimately some of those Half Moons and Rolling M's might be transformed into the roast beef of old England through the exigencies of export trade. But the riders were done with them.

UNTIL the next day the cowboys would have a breathing spell. They could and would turn that little town into a fair imitation of a village undergoing a cheerful riot, a bucolic holiday. They would drink more than was good for them. They would play poker without repining if they went broke in the game. They would loose their pistols at the moon in sheer exuberance.

Ches had seen it all many a time. He had helped swell that genial uproar. Saco, Fort Benton, Cheyenne, Ogallala—it was all the same; as if the cowpuncher were subconsciously aware that like the bee's, his hour was brief and he must make the most of it. Roundups took towns and had their frolic, went their way laughing to do their work in far places.

He was tired. He had no enthusiasm for John Barleycorn, nor did he hanker to peer at an ace in the hole. He had more on his mind now than a John B. Stetson hat. The sight of old Ches jogging around the herd as the riders worked, watching him roost on the top rail of the stockyards, with Duchain occasionally at his elbow, didn't make Ches joyful. Not when he knew Dick would have nothing to do with either herd or range boss and was drinking in solitary silence at the Harper House. Ed Doyle told Ches about that. He had seen him when he went to bring out a case of beer to riders choking in the haze of dust over the yards.

"Oh well, hell, let 'em run their own show to suit themselves," Ches muttered. "Duchain is poison to me, but he seems more important to the Old Man than either of his sons. I may have to work with him for a while, but I'll be damned if I drink or play with him or any of his pets. I'm going to bed."

He was swinging his spurred heels from a billiard table in the Harper House when he came to that conclusion. It was ten o'clock. His father had vanished. So had Dick. At supper time Dick was very drunk, walking straight, but glassy eyed and scowling.

Ches engaged a room and went upstairs. He kicked off his boots, threw up a window, sat down by the sill. The cool night air was pleasant on his face. He sat there for half an hour. He had begun to undress when footsteps came clacking down the bare hallway and a knock sounded at his door.

"Hello," he answered.

"That you, Ches?"

He recognized Ed Doyle's voice and opened the door. Ed's small black mustache bristled. His eyes were bright.

But he wasn't a drinking man and Ches knew these signs of excitement were not alcoholic.

"What's up?"

"Mose has made his talk at Mike Stratton," Doyle told him.

"Well?"

"You goin' to bed?" Ed asked. "Sorry I disturbed you. If you ain't interested I'll pull m' freight."

"Don't be a damned fool," Ches replied. "Come in. What's eating on you? Think I don't care what happens to my men? I didn't think old Long Hair had cold enough nerve, drunk or sober."

"I don't think he has, either. That's why I'm tellin' you." Doyle sat on the edge of the bed and sifted Durham into a brown paper. "Mose is sober as I am. It looks fishy. He crawfished when Mike called him that day in camp. That kid's bad medicine. Every man in the outfit knows it. Why is Mose makin' his talk now? Stratton hasn't crowded him noway. Mose *has* to go through with it now, or even the sheepherders'd spit on him."

"Somebody proddin' him?" Ches hazarded. "That your idea?"

Ed nodded.

"Maybe fixin' to help him out in the pinch. There's some fish in the Half Moon pond I don't fancy. Duchain has some funny pets. Mose is one of 'em. *Sabe?*"

"For some reason Duchain is afraid of me, Ed. He don't like the idea of me being in this country," Ches said softly. "It would be like him to hit at me over somebody else's shoulder. What was Long Hair's talk? Where is Mike now?"

He reached for his boots.

"Down in the hotel bar. Bob's with him. Mose busted loose out of a clear sky in the Maverick. Threw his hat in the kid's face and told him he had one hour to get out of Saco before Mose started makin' a powder fog under his nose."

Ches stood up, buckled on his belt, drew his .45 and rolled the cylinder once or twice, then settled the gun loosely in its holster.

"What did Mike do?"

"Laughed, an' sez, 'Why wait an' hour? Why not start the proceedin's now?' Mose sez, 'I'm givin' you a show. But in an hour I'll send you to sing with the angels if you're in sight.' Then he stalks out, him an' Bob Shields an' Duchain. Duchain comes back to me a little later an' says he's goin' to try to talk Mose out of it, if he can. Don't want no trouble in the outfit."

Ches snorted.

"Let's go join the boys," he said. "Then we'll stroll around. There's four of us."

Ed Doyle thumped him on the back.

"By gosh," he said. "I always knew you were white, Ches. I like that kid."

"So do I," Ches answered. "I like a square deal too. A man could be sure of that around the Half Moon once. It seems different now."

They went downstairs to where Mike Stratton and Bob Doyle were poking billiard balls around on an ancient pool table.

"Darn your old hide, I told you not to ring anybody else in on this," Mike said reproachfully to Ed. "I'd rather you fellers would amble along about your own business."

"Happens to be my business," Ches remarked. "You're working for me. This fuss started over you riding one of my horses. If this Crane party means business it may not stop with you. What do you think about it yourself, Mike?"

Stratton shrugged his shoulders.

"He said his say. If he thought I'd take to cover he has another think comin'. I'm goin' back to the Maverick presently. Then it's up to him."

"We'll all go," Ches said. "See you get an even break."

THEY trooped outside. The night was clear, cool, starlit. In that thin atmosphere, three thousand feet above sea level, sounds carried as if flung off some vast sounding board. Quiet had

descended upon a street that thirty minutes earlier had been full of shouts and laughter. The men would be standing about in little knots, the cowboys and the townsmen, waiting for the inevitable clash, speaking in low tones, sobered. A horse in the street shook himself, making saddle leather creak and steel bit chains rattle. In a slough behind the town frogs croaked, crickets among the nearby sage shrilled.

"Oft in the stilly night," Bob Doyle said above the hollow thump of their bootheels on the walk. But no one so much as smiled.

"Now," Ches said, "when we come to the Maverick, I'll go in first. You come last behind Bob and Ed, Mike. If him or any of his crowd happen to be laying for you—which is not impossible—they won't spring no surprise party."

Stratton nodded.

Frank Duchain stepped out of the doorway of Sam's Place to accost them. A glance through uncurtained windows showed the interior empty, and Ches paused to hear what the Half Moon foreman had to say.

"Hello there," he said. "Where you boys headed?"

"To the Maverick," Ches replied. "Want to come along?"

"Me, I'm not mixing in any war," Duchain growled. "I've tried to talk to that fool Mose, but he's got his neck bowed. I wouldn't go into the Maverick, fellows. What's the use of forcin' trouble?"

"Listen, Duchain," Ches said. "There has been no time in the last six or seven years you haven't led Mose Crane around by the nose. In the beginning one word from you would have kept him off Stratton. Do you think I'm blind or asleep? You come along with us to the Maverick and see a real showdown, for once in your life."

"No, thanks," Duchain replied coolly. "I can get enough trouble without huntin' it. You're all wrong about me havin' anythin' on Mose Crane. He makes a hand in the Half Moon, that's all. If your man and him want to shoot it out, it's their funeral. I can't stop it an' I'm not goin' to be mixed in it."

He walked past them, away from them, toward the hotel. Ches looked after him thoughtfully.

"Aw rats," young Stratton declared. "There's too many people interested in this for my likin'. Damn it, I'm goin' to get it over."

"You're too eager," Ches remarked, keeping step with him. "Now you come last, when we go in."

He pushed ahead. The Doyles followed. Stratton obediently took the rear. Ches paused on the threshold of the Maverick. The stage was set. Long-haired Mose stood at the far end of the bar where he commanded the front entrance. A partition and a group of his friends covered the rear. His eye was on the front and his hand dangled by his side.

Ches counted noses. Working day by day in the Half Moon, he had used his eyes and his ears. Out of twenty riders half a dozen were neutral, doing loyally the work for which they drew pay. Three or four were indeterminate, weather vane fellows, likely to swing either way in a moment of excitement. The rest, probably eight men, were all Duchain, ready to do his bidding. And these had sided with Long-haired Mose from the beginning, looking always a little sidewise at the Rolling M quartette. They were here now. What the bond was Ches didn't know. He could only guess. But he knew that because they were for Duchain they were also for Mose Crane who ate out of Duchain's hand.

Ches stared at them and they at him. He wasn't quite sure why, but he had an idea that if one gun came out of its holster there would be a lot of shooting in that saloon. Ches had come there not alone to back Mike Straton, but to spike the guns altogether for the present.

He had his own reasons. But how? Mike was still behind the Doyles. Long-haired Mose might or might not draw his gun the moment he sighted his man. If Mose moved, Stratton wouldn't hesitate.

Ches had seen Mike use his gun on a badger, once on a coyote. He was deadly. Ches had little doubt of the outcome with regard to Long-haired Mose alone. It was the rest of the Half Moon crew he had concern for.

He walked the length of the bar straight for Crane. The other riders drew back. They could see Stratton now. But Ches was between Mike and his antagonist and so were the Doyles.

"Before you start any fuss, you listen to me a second," he said coldly.

"You takin' the play away from Stratton?" Mose demanded. "I got no quarrel with you, Williams."

"You will have if you keep on," Ches assured him. "This is twice you've jumped Mike Stratton without any reason. Who is there behind you that tells you you shouldn't like the shape of his head? When you jump my men just because they are my men you jump me. Do you *sabe* that?

"Now, I am not going to lift a finger to stop you, old Long Hair. If you think you're a wolf from Bitter Creek and it's your night to howl, nobody's holdin' you. You're old enough to know better. But you think about this. Don't figure on any of your friends helpin' you out. Because there are three of us here to see a square deal. If you happen to have a sidekick or two who make a motion to draw a gun on your side they'll be dead before they get the hammer back. That's all."

Ches stepped aside, clear of the bar, over until his back was against the opposite wall. And there the Doyles joined him without a word. Mike stood ten feet within the door, smiling slightly, his hands hanging by his sides, his eyes steadfast on Long-haired Mose.

"Your hour is up, Mose," he said at last, "an' I'm still here."

Mose Crane whitened under his tan. He looked past Mike to Ches standing by the wall, flanked by the two Doyles, lean dark silent men, watchful and composed. Plainly Mose didn't like the formation. He put both his hands on the bar.

"Why, hell," he cried, "this is a frame-up."

Mike Stratton shook his head.

"No," said he, "if there was a frame-up it has gone wrong. This is strictly between you and me. My boss'll be like your boss. He'll keep out of it. Come on, old Long Hair. You started this. Why don't you finish it? I get nervous waitin'—I want to be put out of my misery."

Stratton's tone was a taunt, a palpable sneer.

"Damned if I will," Mose shouted. "I know this Williams bunch. They play cinches. You don't get me tangled up where I lose no matter if I win. If you had guts enough to go up against me without draggin' your whole bunch in, I'd 'a'—"

Mike pounced like a cougar, and Long-haired Mose shrank back as if a sword had whistled by his face. But he didn't reach for his gun. Stratton deliberately struck him twice across the face. The first blow came open handed. The second was a clenched fist that made Mose stagger.

"Go yap with the coyotes," Mike said contemptuously, "you bag of wind!"

And Long-haired Mose went, like a cur with his tail between his legs, blood seeping out of his nostrils, yammering over his shoulder about them ganging up on him, until he slid furtively through a side door into the night.

CHAPTER VIII

MIKE ASKS A QUESTION

"YOU COME with me," Ches said to Mike Stratton. "I've got a room in the hotel. We have both tramped on some tender corns tonight. I don't hanker to be shot at when I'm not looking. The place for us is in bed."

They left the Maverick. Outside, Bob and Ed Doyle stopped by their horses, dozing patiently on three legs before a hitching rack.

"Think we'll mosey off to camp," Ed

said. "There's nothin' to celebrate an' we ain't too popular with some of these Half Moon boys."

"You're wise," Ches agreed. "Good night."

"I might as well go along with them," Stratton suggested.

"No," Ches said decidedly. "Mose Crane will be missing from the roundup after this. He's apt to slide out to camp any time now to collect his bed and belongings. If you're there—" Ches made a gesture. "You better stay with me."

"You think he'll run?" Mike grinned.

"How could he stick it after tonight?" Ches asked. "He's showed a yellow streak a yard wide. He couldn't stand to rub elbows with the same crowd after that. You'll see. Where's your horse, Mike?"

"Stabled him. Meant to stay in town all night."

"Come on, then."

They moved without haste along the sidewalk, past the restaurant, past the dark front of a general store. Between the bright windows of the Ark Saloon and the Harper House a vacant lot lay dim, a shadowy recess. Blurred shapes of a pile of lumber and one or two decrepit wagons loomed there. Ches glanced idly as he passed. From a corner window of the Harper House light fell upon him and Mike.

Ches felt something pluck at his shirt. Back in that dark place flashed a blaze like a monstrous chrysanthemum—yellow, orange, fiery red.

Ambush hadn't occurred to Ches. Yet that pluck at his shirt front was a bullet, missing him by half an inch. For one brief instant he stood dumbfounded. It was Stratton who acted, with the speed of thought itself. He shoved Ches, threw himself aside, so that they lurched out of that beam. A gun cracked again and splinters flew from the hotel corner.

"Drop down," Mike whispered.

He was firing as he spoke. And Ches, over that first sheer amazement, drew his own gun and shot blind and large into that shrouded place.

Then they held their fire, straining their eyes for movement. Stratton began to whisper something. Ches thought he saw a dim shape at the back of the lot and fired at it twice. In the succeeding silence heads came out of hotel windows above them. Voices called angrily, protesting against the disturbance.

Ches started to move into those shadows. Mike caught him by the arm.

"Better not," he counseled. "There's two of 'em. You can't come up on a bushwhacker among that stuff without makin' yourself a mark."

"That's so. Probably *vamosed* by now anyway."

They moved warily around the hotel corner, entered the office, climbed the stairs to Ches Williams' room, drew the blind and lighted a lamp; then stared frowning at each other.

"That was for you," Stratton said finally. "And I would have reckoned it would be me."

Ches continued to wrinkle his brows for half a minute before he replied:

"Yes. And that's kinda funny. Long Hair has had to crawl twice for you. Yet he shoots at me."

"No cinch Mose Crane did that shootin'," Stratton answered.

"I take it for granted," Ches rubbed his chin reflectively. "Who else did you think it might be?"

"You never can tell," Mike drawled. "Seems to me there's other people in the Half Moon ain't exactly fond of you."

Ches smiled at that way of putting it. He was impressed by the shrewdness behind that remark. Mike evidently could think as well as act, and do either without any fuss.

"I don't think anybody would try to kill me from a back alley. Nobody but a cur like Mose Crane. If it wasn't him, who was it?"

"You shot a man here four years ago," Mike said. "Maybe somebody is takin' it up for him."

"Oh, rats—" Ches stopped. He had almost denied that killing. He hadn't shot Jess Ridley. Yet he had been for-

mally tried and legally acquitted for that killing. "No," he went on, "Ridley was a lone wolf. The kind of friends he had wouldn't take it up. Or if they did, they'd jump me in the open. No, I guess it was Mose all right."

"Maybe," Mike said. "Still that first shot was aimed careful at you. Maybe he didn't care which of us he got. But I'd like to know, just for fun, where Mister Frank Duchain, our eminent Half Moon range boss, was about that time."

"Has Duchain got anything against you?" Ches asked curiously.

"Those shots were fired at you. There were two of them shooting. If Duchain has anythin' against me he doesn't know it—yet."

Mike grinned at something that stirred in his mind and his grimace was a good deal like that of a wolf baring its teeth. Ches stared at him.

"If you know anything, come out in the open, Mike," he exclaimed impatiently.

"I don't *know* anythin'," Stratton said very deliberately. "And if I did I wouldn't tell *you*. Not right now. All I can say is that I don't like some people connected with the Half Moon. An' the Half Moon is your folks, after all's said an' done."

CHES took a turn or two across the floor. That vague sense of hidden forces operating against him, of a malign intention manifesting itself in obscure channels—it didn't dismay him, but it did sometimes make him crave support, understanding. And there was something about Mike—Ches didn't know what it was, except the common possession of youth and courage and a sense of loyalty. He wanted to show his hand to Mike, yet there was scarcely a definite card to lay on the table.

However, such as they were—Ches looked at Mike Stratton, straight, slim, hard eyed.

"Mike," he said, "what's your ambition in life, apart from punching cows for a living?"

A queer expression flickered across the boy's face.

"If I was to tell you," he said slowly, "it might maybe start a argument. Were you thinkin' of givin' me some fatherly advice?"

"Hardly," Ches shook his head. "If anything, I may need that myself before I'm through. I just wondered what your idea was about where you wanted to get."

"Right now, since the evenin's excitement is over," said Mike, "I'd as soon get to sleep."

"Well, there's a bed," Ches told him.

Mike unbuckled his spurs, thrust his gun under a pillow and undressed. He put his hands under his head and stared at the ceiling. Ches himself followed suit in a minute. With the lamp out, the faint glimmer of the night lighted a little that small dark room. Beside him Mike breathed easily and regularly until Ches thought him asleep. His own eyelids were growing heavy when Mike's voice broke the silence—

"D' you ever hear any rumor about rustlin' on the Half Moon range two three years ago?"

"Eh?" Ches was startled to instant wakefulness. His own mind had been turning fruitlessly on that. "No—well, nothing definite. I went away from here four years ago. A lot happened that I never heard about till I came back. I haven't been in Montana more than three weeks, yet, Mike. Why?"

"I heard it," Mike murmured. "The Half Moon had a wagon boss that got killed kinda mysterious. They say he was rustlin' off the outfit."

"That's a damned lying slander," Ches said. "I knew Baldy Cooper from the time I was knee high. Where'd you hear that?"

"People talk."

"How long were you around Saco before you went to work for me, Mike?" Ches asked.

"Oh, three weeks or a month, I reckon."

"What were you doing?"

"Just ridin' around."

"Listening to gossip. Don't you believe anything like that you hear about

Baldy Cooper, Mike, if you want to get along with me."

"It is never mentioned who shot him," Mike continued. "Range bosses that turn crooked sometimes gets dealt with quiet-like by their own outfit."

"The Half Moon is owned by my father," Ches said. "He never sprouted no wings. He believes in holdin' his own. Always did manage to. But he has always done whatever he did in the open, whenever his hand was forced. He's a hard man, but he's a square man. He wouldn't hire a man murdered, even if his mind got poisoned against that man. The Half Moon didn't kill Baldy Cooper—no more than I did—and I was like old Baldy's son. I don't care what they say. Nobody had better say that about him to me. 'S all lies. People's tongues. Pah!"

"Big outfits do sometimes carry things with a high hand, when they figure their interests are at stake," Mike said.

"I know," Ches admitted. "But sometimes that's the trick of somebody working for a stand-in with the big outfit, tryin' to make a reputation—not the outfit's own policy."

"Well, I have been wonderin'," Mike went on deliberately. "What I have heard has made me plumb curious. This Duchain, they tell me, was nothin' a-tall till Cooper went out. Then he begins to cut a lot of ice in this country. He has a big swing with a big outfit. Take yourself. Why ain't you runnin' the Half Moon round-up? You're a cowman from your heels up. Your brother can't be so slow. Yet you both take a back seat, an' Mister Duchain is the big noise. An' he don't like you worth a cent. I've seen him look at you—well. He's got that same attitude toward us fellers that ride for you. He's uneasy around us. You know I got a notion Duchain sicked Long-haired Mose on to me. Suppose he did? Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe." Ches was noncommittal. "You're an observing cuss, Mike. Maybe you'll learn more about Frank Duchain if you stay with the Rolling M."

"Studyin' snakes never was my pastime," Mike said dryly. "I generally leave 'em be—or else knock their heads off an' ride on."

"I have not got Duchain figured out yet." Ches shifted on his pillow. "I know he likes neither me nor my outfit. I know he isn't easy in his mind about me. I have only an idea why. Until I have something more than an idea I disregard him, except when he half starts to show his teeth. Then I just naturally bristle up."

"It wouldn't take much to make me lock horns with him," Mike said. "Maybe I better quit the Rollin' M."

"You better stay right where you are," Ches advised. "I can use fellows like you indefinite. There's a lot of good land in the Larb Hills yet. You can work for me and hold down a homestead at the same time. Save your money and put it into cows. Open range won't last forever, but it'll last long enough for them that gets in on the ground floor to make a fortune."

"Yeah? This Baldy Cooper got himself a ranch in the Larb. They say he had a neat bunch of cattle too. Where did he get off at?"

"Oh, hell!" Ches snapped irritably. "Lay off that. I think about it enough. Quit jawing and go to sleep. It's after midnight."

MIKE turned over. As if he took that command literally he was asleep, snoring lightly, long before Ches closed his eyes. But Ches slept at last, like a log, in a spring bed that was luxurious after many nights on hard ground with rest broken by watches on the herd. He didn't waken till sunrise. Mike was up and gone.

Saco lay hushed in the cool, bright morning, a sedate hamlet by a railway track; stovepipes were beginning to spit smoke. The tents of the Half Moon stood on the bank of Milk River where it bent away in a sweeping curve to the north. The saddle bunch grazed under the watchful eye of the wrangler. Ches could hear the bells tinkle as the leaders

shifted. The morning wind brought him a faint smell of hoof bruised sage, pungent, aromatic. Ches stretched himself and thought of hotcakes and coffee.

He thought of Vinnie Cooper, too. His eye, questing toward Bull MacCormack's house, saw two figures emerge therefrom. One was a woman. The man carried a suitcase. They walked across to the station. From down the track came the drumming of a train.

On impulse Ches started for the station. Vinnie was going away and he wanted to see her. He was hungry for a look at her, for the sound of her voice. He hadn't realized how overpowering that peculiar sort of hunger can become all in a moment. And in the back of his mind was a dim wonder that Mike Stratton knew her well enough to carry her bag and see her off on a train.

But the train beat him. The track lay between him and the depot. The engine snorted by, brakes ground and squealed to a halt by the platform.

That was before the time of vestibuled coaches. Ches made for a car step. But he didn't climb and cross. He stopped short in his tracks. Vinnie came up on the opposite side while he was yet thirty feet away. At her heels climbed Mike with the bag. He set it down, put his arm around Vinnie. She lifted her face and Mike kissed her, patted her shoulder. Then a warning blast from the locomotive, a clank of couplings and Mike leaped lightly to the platform. Neither of them saw Ches. They had eyes only for each other.

And Ches turned away, striding back across the dusty street to Saco's sidewalk, a curious tumult in his breast.

CHAPTER IX

THE THREAT

CHES knew that disturbance for what it was—a fierce, unreasoning burst of jealousy. That—in his own phrase—was crazy. He didn't own Vinnie Cooper. She was free to kiss whom she pleased. It was her right. Thus by an effort of will and common sense he stifled an emotion that for a half minute was pretty close to destructive hatred, a feeling that included both Mike and Vinnie, and left him just a little ashamed. He was too proud to let a senseless rage master him; and he was quite himself when Mike overhauled him on the sidewalk.

"I feel like grub," he said casually.

"Same here," Mike answered.

Together they turned into Sam's Place, since the Harper House served breakfast only at the reasonable hour of 6:30 A.M.

As they emerged from the restaurant Ches saw Frank Duchain ride by, dismount and disappear within the hotel. Shortly after that Ches forgot him, as half a dozen men sought Ches out. They were ranch laborers, and a carpenter arrived on that morning train in answer to his telegrams. While he put them up at the Harper House against the arrival of a wagon from the ranch, the operator brought him a wire from his friend in Chinook saying that three cowpunchers were en route to join the Half Moon round-up.

So now he had nothing to do until the Half Moon restocked the grub-box and hauled back to the open range. He loitered on the sidewalk with Mike. He wondered how Mike knew Vinnie Cooper well enough to kiss her goodby on a train. He wondered where Vinnie had gone and when she would be back. He wondered if Long-haired Mose had slunk away or if he still lingered. His mind ran on those shots at him from a dark lot. The nip of cloth out of his shirt bosom gave an unpleasant edge to that experience. Ambush and murderous malice seemed fantastic, incongruous with that first warm sunshine bathing a sleepy little cowtown. Still . . .

He left Mike whittling fine curls from a bit of pine and walked into the hotel.

His father sat in the office. He beckoned Ches. His mustache had a droop

that Ches knew as a sign of irritation.

"Look here," he began abruptly, "you seem to be at your old trick of stirrin' up trouble. And I don't want no trouble in my outfit nor on my range. I've had plenty. Can't you work with my round-up without tryin' to disorganize it?"

"I see no reason for the Half Moon round-up to get disorganized," Ches answered calmly, "because a would-be bad actor jumps one of my men without occasion—and then weakens in the pinch. That's all there is to this trouble, which I suppose your illustrious range boss came blathering to you first chance. Did any other range foreman of yours ever worry you with petty larceny details like that? I guess not. He'd 'a' got his papers right then and there. Why not let Frank Duchain do his own fighting?"

"If you would take that chip off your shoulder there would be no occasion for any fighting," his father stormed. "I know you. If you don't like a man, that's enough. You're goin' to be like a boil on this range. Have you got to operate here? There's lots of territory for you to run the Rollin' M besides on the Half Moon range. I don't want you startin' a shoestring cow outfit here. It don't mean nothin' to you anyway. I'll buy your cattle from you at your own figure, if you'll go an' play at the cow business somewhere besides in my dooryard."

Ches stared at him.

"I am not selling out to anybody," he said slowly. "Do you mean to say that you are going to buck me because I'm starting a legitimate business on my own hook?"

"No. But because you're all set to raise hell," Old Ches declared. "And there's been plenty for me. I won't have it. The Rollin' M means no more to you than any other bunch of cattle, anywhere else. Name a figure. I'll pay it, an' you stay off my range."

"No," Ches shook his head. "The Rolling M cattle do mean something to me. I have taken over that old Cooper place in the Larb, too. Be reasonable, Dad."

"I'll take the lease off your hands at an advance."

"You will like hell!" Ches broke out angrily. "You won't take anything off my hands. I know what I'm doing. I'll see it through in spite of—"

He ended with a shrug of his shoulders. Useless to explain what he meant to his father. But he wouldn't quit—no matter how easy it might be made for him to quit. Nor would he be bluffed. The memory of that shot from ambush angered him anew. Run him off as soon as he was home? No. Not till he had forced these hidden enemies into the open. He wasn't a Mose Crane to talk big and then crawl. He hadn't talked big. He had merely made himself a promise which he meant to keep.

"Let's drop it," said he. "I'm in the cow business in the Larb Hills to stay till I am ready to go—unless I go feet first, before my time."

"Nobody's threatenin' you," Old Ches bristled. "I'm tryin' to head off trouble, that's all."

"Who's promising trouble because I happen to be around here?" Ches demanded.

"Nobody. You're a promise of trouble yourself, with your high handed ways," his father growled.

"Well, I'll promise to make no trouble for you, dad, no matter," Ches smiled amiably, "how much I may make for somebody else."

The Old Man stared at him under lowering, white eyebrows. Whether in anger or disappointment Ches wasn't quite sure. But he was troubled. That was implicit on a visage whose play of expression Ches had been reading ever since he could remember.

"Forget it," he said cheerfully. "I'm all for making a success of the Rolling M. But you'll still rule the roost with the Half Moon. My outfit won't interfere with yours. There's plenty of room."

Williams senior made an impatient gesture with his hands and turned away. Ches went out, pondering deeply.

THE HALF MOON chuck wagon was backing up to a store. Riders were dispersed about the town. Bob and Ed Doyle were there, cheerful and jocular. Mike wandered about, unconcerned. Duchain was visible, checking over a list of supplies with his cook. But Long-haired Mose was out of the picture and none mentioned him, nor mourned his going.

And so when noon came, the riders gathered about the chuck wagon once more. When the last plate clicked into the dishpan the tents came down, horses were caught, harnessed, hitched, saddles cinched on. The Half Moon turned south again across the sage grown flats.

Ches lingered in Saco a little while on his own business, alone. As he crossed the railroad track to trail the outfit, hull down in the distance now, like a ship at sea, Dick came loping to join him, sober and clear eyed. Ches regarded him gravely. The old sunny carelessness had fallen away from Dick, and Ches wondered why. But he only said—

"What were you celebrating yesterday —somebody's birthday?"

"No. Celebrating a good resolution—to drink no more hard liquor."

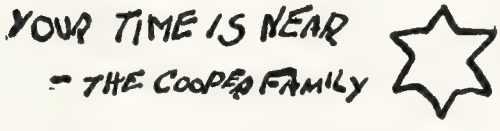
"So as a sort of last act you tried to drink up all there was in town, eh?"

They laughed together.

"Come along with the round-up for a change," Ches suggested.

"Uh-uh. Too much Duchain for my stomach. I'm headed home. Old man's gone to Helena on some business. I rode after you to show you something."

He drew an envelope from his pocket, took a sheet therefrom and passed it to Ches. Unfolded, it displayed:



"It come in the mail this mornin'. The Old Man got one. So did Duchain."

Ches reached into a pocket, hauled forth a similar envelope, a like message, crudely printed.

"Well," he grinned, "they play no favorites, eh? I got one too. What do you think?"

"What do *you* think?" Dick countered.

"Well, so far as I've thought," Ches replied, "it strikes me that after letting it lie for over two years the Cooper family—from all I've ever heard of 'em—wouldn't be likely to start with a cheap scare-warning like this. If they concluded to hold the Half Moon responsible for murdering Baldy Cooper, I figure they'd write their messages with their guns. No, I don't take this stuff seriously. Unless—well, unless somebody wants to take an underhanded crack at us and wants to throw the blame on the Coopers."

"Why include you?" Dick frowned. "You were in Colorado when it happened. You had nothing to do with the Half Moon. You haven't now."

"I'm a Williams," Ches said. "If there's to be a family feud, I'd be included, naturally. But I wouldn't worry about this, Dick. It's too coarse. It's cheap."

"Sometimes," Dick told him, "cheap men are the most dangerous. Anyway, I don't worry. But the Old Man does."

"I can't imagine him worried about a thing like this," Ches waved the envelope disdainfully.

"Only as it affects us," Dick said. "He thinks a lot of us, Ches, if he does take darned contrary ways of showing it. There are times when he will abuse me worse than any man I know would dare. I don't mind it, but I don't suppose you could take it off him. He's old and he's slipping, and he knows it. That's why I stay with him. Otherwise he'd be all alone. I'm not much use to him. But he drove you away with his harshness. And he seems to want to hang on to me. Now you're back on your own. And he seems to smell trouble."

"Why from me?" Ches wondered. "Because I'm starting to build up an outfit of my own and don't propose to let people like Frank Duchain and his pets put

spokes in my wheel? He's crazy with the heat. What does he want? I offered to take hold of the range for him if he'd get rid of Duchain. I can handle it. All he had to offer me was the privilege of hanging around the place. As if I'd sit twiddling my thumbs while a grandstander like Duchain swaggered around the country as boss of the Half Moon. But I'm too busy, and I hope I've got too much sense, to make trouble just because I don't like a man. If other people stir up a fuss with me that's their lookout. What is he afraid of?"

"That's for him to tell you, not me," Dick answered.

"You have been on the spot all the time. You've got a head on you. What hold's Duchain got on the Half Moon? Did the outfit get away with Baldy Cooper, and he knows it, and the Old Man give him the job and a slice of the outfit to shut his mouth?"

Dick looked straight ahead.

"That's something you'll have to ask the Old Man," he said at last.

"Don't you know?" Ches persisted.

Dick turned in his saddle to face his brother.

"I'm supposed to but I don't know," he said and his eyes burned. "I only know what I've been told. I wish to God I did know for sure."

"I'll know by and by," Ches asserted. "In the first place, I have heard these whispers that Cooper took to rustling, and I don't believe a word of it. In the second place, as soon as he was dead every hoof of his cattle vanished. His girl is left to earn her grub by working in a restaurant. I'm going to find out who killed Cooper and why, and who got his cattle. If *that's* what the Old Man's afraid of, if it turns out to be the Half Moon's dirty work, by the Lord, he better be afraid of trouble. Because I'll make plenty for everybody concerned."

Dick rode three hundred yards without speaking.

"You'll have to scotch your own snakes," he said at last. "I don't blame you for taking it up for Vinnie. I have heard about these Double C cattle disappearing off the range. But I can tell you this: I myself heard the old man issue positive orders that Cooper's stuff was to be left alone, because Duchain suggested that we ought to grab them. And during that season they vanished. The Double C couldn't be worked over into a Half Moon. And I know all our shipping records.

"So I can tell you flat the Half Moon didn't get away with Cooper's cattle. I felt just the same about Vinnie Cooper's fix that you do. I was sorry for her. I tried to help her. But I expect I went at it wrong. I offered her money. She just about spat in my face. Well, I turn off here."

"What's your rush," Ches asked. "We might as well talk this thing out."

"No use," Dick answered. "Talk doesn't get us anywhere."

IT DIDN'T, Ches reflected, watching Dick's bay horse bob up and down until he passed over a ridge that lifted out of the Saco flats. Then he spurred up to overtake the Half Moon.

The Cooper family. And the Lone Star which signified the State of Texas, where the Coopers were a numerous clan, and had been since the time of the Alamo. That wouldn't be their method. They wouldn't issue anonymous warnings. No. Ches took out that crudely printed sheet. But studying it told him nothing. A threat was nothing until it became embodied in action. Until then— He shoved the thing back in his pocket disdainfully.

He caught up with a group of riders trailing a mile behind the *remuda*. The September sun had August strength. The land was bone dry, hot. Puffs of dust flew wisplike from under hoofs. Ed Doyle wished for a case of beer off the ice, and swore a man who punched cows for a living needed his head examined. Some of them grunted agreement, running tongue points over dry lips. They struck no water until they made

camp on a creek oozing out of the northern edge of Sun Prairie.

Here, while early supper was in the making a four-horse team rattled up, with Bull MacCormack on the driver's seat.

"I'm goin' right through tonight," he stopped to tell Ches. "Say, suppose I take the wife out by'n'by, when I get the ranch fixed up a little more? I get lonesome."

A year earlier Ches Williams would have laughed at the notion of this curly headed mastodon's being lonely in the midst of a thousand tasks. He could understand better now.

"Sure," he said. "There's a carpenter waiting you in Saco. He can get the house in shape. Maybe you could get Vinnie Cooper to come along to keep your missus company, if she likes."

"I'll do that," Bull nodded. "Feel easier in m' mind if she was with us. Hello, there, Mike. How's the boy? You ridin'?"

"For the Rollin' M," Mike passed with a nod and a word on his way to the bed tent.

"We're pilin' lots of hay," Bull said. "Well, so long. Got to move or I'll eat a darned late supper in Saco."

Bull, Ches surmised, could be very persuasive. Maybe he would get Vinnie to come to the Larb Hills with his wife. People went away on trains. But they came back. Vinnie didn't need to come back unless she wanted. She had plenty of money now. He had paid for the first year's lease.

But when he looked at Mike he remembered that kiss. Yes, undoubtedly she would come back. Ches shook himself angrily. What of it?

Irritation gripped him. He had come from four years of a life full of practical difficulties, but singularly free from subtleties, complexities, to be engulfed in this muddle, to find himself in a coil of cross-purposes, in an atmosphere charged with conflict and danger and suspicion.

Why plunge himself in that? He could take his father's offer for the Rolling M, go back to Colorado and run the Arrow round-up with nothing on his mind but his hat. He could go anywhere he chose. The world was wide. Why not?

He shook himself again, impatiently. His eyes fell on Duchain stalking about camp. Long-haired Mose, who ate out of Duchain's hand, working up to a killing, and sneaking away to stab in the dark. Crooked men. Obscure motives. He was in it—in deep. His people, his father and Dick, were in deeper. Ches had that conviction.

He couldn't quit. He had to see it through.

CHAPTER X

THE CHALLENGE

THE TRIO of new Rolling M cowpunchers caught the Half Moon round-up when the Larb Hills were a huge mound west of the camp. And one of the riders was *not* new. He was a short, bandy legged man, so fat that his blue eyes peeped out from between lids that were rolls of flesh. Ches jumped up, unmindful of spilling his plate of food, to fall upon this chunky person and beat him on the back with delight.

"Shorty, you old son-of-a-gun!" he cried. "I thought you were dead or in the pen or turned sheepherder or something. And you come to ride for me?"

"Yump," the dumpy one answered. "Sure."

"Meet Mike Stratton," Ches waved a hand to Mike squatted in the dry grass. "Mike's young like me, but he makes a hand."

The Doyles rose up together from the other side of the chuck-wagon with genial oaths of surprised greeting.

"'Lo, Ed. 'Lo, Bob." Shorty MacLean shook hands with each.

"Where you been all this time?" they demanded.

"Texas, Injun Territory, Oregon, Idaho. Kep' movin'."

Frank Duchain peered out from the flap of the cook tent.

"Hello, there, Shorty," said he.

MacLean looked at him, looked him up and down.

"Hello," he said.

His tone was dry. He pinched words. But it was dryer and his words more pinched when he spoke to Duchain—and he turned his back with the words.

Shorty weighed a hundred and eighty on five foot six of height. His face was like a full moon; he had a torso like a sack of potatoes. Strangers seeing Shorty in a round-up camp wondered how he mounted a horse and, having mounted, how he contrived to stay there. When they saw him in action they ceased to wonder at anything. He had a reputation across seven States as a rider, a roper, a gunman, a reputation for cold nerve and quick wits.

Old Ches Williams once said that Shorty MacLean was the smartest man north of the Platte and west of the Missouri. Only he would never stay put. For Shorty something desirable always lay under the horizon and he had to go and look. Once he had stayed with the Half Moon two full years. He had taught Ches a lot of smart things with a rope, and about a gun. Like Baldy Cooper, he had been a second father to Ches, when he was an eager, reckless stripling.

So much. The other two were just cowpunchers. Ches sent these straight to the home ranch to ride line on the Rolling M cattle, to keep them within bounds for a time. Shorty stayed with the round-up. It amused him to see how Shorty's presence fretted Duchain. There were too many Rolling M riders of a certain caliber in the Half Moon round-up to suit Duchain.

All this under the surface. Outwardly Duchain led circle, issued orders, ran his round-up as any wagon boss should. They combed the range for beeves. The day herd grew, fattened by Rolling M stock cattle picked up here and there. In three weeks they had another beef herd, and turned for the railroad. When the cut was made there were not above three hundred Rolling M's in that herd to be thrown on their own range. Too few—far too few.

October was at hand. Ches took his own riders, all four, to push that bunch into the Larb. He reflected on the number, but kept his reflections to himself. And the five rode for the Cooper ranch to get food at noon.

FROM the bank of Blacktail, Ches uttered a startled exclamation. Where the stable stood was a square of charred sticks and ashes.

Bull MacCormack swore when he met them in the yard.

"Accident, hell!" he growled. "Somebody touched a match to her. Somebody that took a coupla shots at us when we was gettin' the horses out. Somebody's sure got their knife out for you, Ches. Darn near got the big haystacks. We been standin' night guard ever since."

Ches pondered that as they jogged on the trail of the Half Moon. A beef herd moves slowly. Speed knocks tallow off fat steers, peels dollars off a cattle man's bankroll. They crawled across Sun Prairie at the mad speed of twelve miles a day.

When they were camped on a creek below the old Oliver ranch a rider came out to bespeak them. He told them that some one had fired haystacks there totaling five hundred tons of winter feed.

The herd dropped to the Saco flats, crept into the stockyards, rolled east in slatted cars. And rumor ran in the town that the home ranch of the Half Moon had suffered from the firebug also. A thousand tons of hay, a stable, certain out-buildings gone up in smoke, under cover of a dark night.

Ches thought of the warning posted to each of them. It might be. A blood feud takes strange turns. Yet there was a doubt. He wrinkled his brows in futile speculation. What next? Nothing to be done. A man can not leap furiously at the throat of the unknown.

And there was another matter for him to ponder. One more sweep across country and the round-up was done, the Half

Moon range covered to the outermost fringe. Rolling M's were scarce, latterly, where they should have been plentiful. Ches didn't mention that fact at large. But he sat for an hour in the Harper House, talking in lowered tones to Shorty MacLean, while Shorty listened, nodding comprehension. And when the Half Moon broke south from Saco next morning Shorty was gone, ostensibly to the home ranch in the Larb Hills, in reality upon a mission Ches alone knew about.

INDIAN SUMMER lingered briefly and passed. The heat went out of the sun. A fall rain beat on them for twenty-four hours. Fall winds dried the earth till the soil was parched like midsummer, and the dust rose in clouds as they worked each round-up. Yet the nights grew chilly as days shortened.

During all this time no one mentioned Long-haired Mose Crane. With his passing, with that clash averted, with the coming of Shorty MacLean, Frank Duchain's manner seemed to alter imperceptibly. He grew softer voiced with all of them. He seldom addressed any Rolling M man save in the way of work. Ches marked that and smiled to himself. It wasn't natural. Sometimes the impassiveness on Duchain's face didn't jibe with the look in his eyes.

However, this was a mere suspicion. Outwardly it was all hard work for them, long hours in the saddle, the monotony of coming and going in haste. They swept around the east side of the Larb, across the south slope where the hills dipped to the Bad Lands, combed this desolate network of cañons for forty miles west, came out on Serviceberry, a little below the Half Moon meadows, one day the first week of November, with the last beef herd of the season in hand.

Certain facts revolved in Ches Williams' mind. He dwelt upon them during middle guard on a night when frost sparkled like diamond dust on grass washed by a full moon. Summer was gone. Winter blew his first cold breath to herald his coming. Thin ice made a scum on water puddles at dawn. These too were seasonal phenomena, but they were not uppermost in one man's mind.

He was wondering, for one thing, about Shorty MacLean. He had sent Shorty on an errand. Shorty hadn't returned. He hadn't sent word.

The herd was bedded on a flat bench, a dark blot in the shimmer of moonlight on frost rimmed grass. Ches stopped his horse. Mike Stratton joined him. They rolled cigarets. Sixteen hundred cattle slept like one beast. Two men—one man—half a man, could hold them while they lay. They ceased their circular patrol. They could see all across the herd. A beast couldn't rise unseen.

"You know who owns a brand like three links of a chain," Mike asked suddenly, "an' where they come from?"

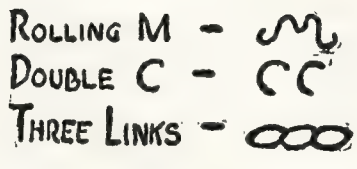
"I have an idea," Ches answered. "Why?"

"Me an' Bob Shields an' Tom Frayne was on that last river ride yesterday," Mike told him. "Down in the last bottom was a bunch of stock. No beef in it, nor any of your stuff. So Shields said leave 'em. There was about half a dozen Three Links."

"Well, what about it?" Ches inquired.

"Nothin'," the boy said. "Except it struck me that Three Link would be a useful brand to own where there was cattle branded with a Rollin' M. Or"—he drawled the last sentence—"the Double C, which once had a few hundred head in these parts."

Ches again visualized the three brands and recognized their similarity.



"I have thought of that," Ches admitted. "I saw a couple of Three Link cows in a round-up early in the season. I said nothing. Nobody mentioned where it was owned. I looked in the book and

it is not there. So I wrote to the Stock Association. The Three Link was registered since the last brand book was made up. It is owned by the Three Link Cattle Company—manager, Joe Sumner. Range is the Musselshell River."

"The mouth of the Musselshell is right opposite here," Mike commented. " 'Sall right, I guess. I just wondered."

"It may be and it may not." Ches hunched sidewise in his saddle and looked at Mike. "Keep this under your hat, Mike. I am not mentioning it generally. But there is something radically wrong on this range. You have heard this talk about Baldy Cooper who ran the Half Moon for years?"

"Sure. I told you I had," young Stratton muttered. "An' I know his girl."

Yes, he knew her, Ches thought with a pang. But he choked that down. He would *not* be small. Presently they would all be gathered at that ranch in the Larb Hills. Vinnie would be there. She was there now, with Bull MacCormack's wife. It was up to Vinnie. And he liked Mike Stratton. That was the devil of it—he liked Mike, admired him. Jealousy *was* small; it was a cheap emotion; it was rotten. Ches squared his shoulders.

"Baldy Cooper was murdered. There is no question in my mind about that," he said. "His cattle disappeared. They weren't grabbed and rebranded by the Half Moon. They were not shipped and sold. I have looked into that. The Half Moon was blamed for that—I have heard such whispers. But *I* wasn't. How could I be when I was fifteen hundred miles away?

"Yet somebody is hitting at me. I don't believe Old Ches Williams would hire murder done, nor steal a dead man's cattle. Nor do I believe he would steal cattle from his son. He's a hard man, but not that kind of a man. Yet somebody has got away with a lot of Rolling M's. I won't tell you how many head I'm short, Mike, but it's a heap.

"And there have been threats. I have a paper in my pocket right now, signed the Cooper family, telling me my time is near. So has my father. So has my brother. We have had buildings and hay stacks burned. I was shot at in Saco. Maybe that was Mose Crane, but why did he deliberately take a pot at me instead of you. *You* made a monkey of him. And, finally, somebody took two long range shots at me today down in the breaks."

"I heard them two shots," Mike said. "I was on the next ridge. You didn't see nobody?"

Ches shook his head.

"I had ridden over to look into a gulch. One bullet plowed the dirt up under my horse's belly. The other whistled by my head. I don't like these things, Mike," he continued. "I've got to get to the bottom of it somehow, if they don't get me first."

The cattle lay, curved horns shining under the moon, keen-pointed scimitars, the sound of bovine breathing faintly audible like the sighing of a multitude. Mike hooked one leg over the horn of his saddle.

"You think maybe the Coopers are takin' up a feud for old Baldy?" he asked.

"I didn't say that," Ches replied. "I don't see why they would let it lay two years and then start bushwhacking *me*."

"Cooper wasn't killed for fun," Mike hazarded. "There was a reason. Now you know this country. You was raised among these people. Who would be likely to want Baldy Cooper out of the way? Who had somethin' to gain? Who has a point to be made by gettin' away with you?"

"If I could answer that I would know all I want to know," Ches said.

"I can tell you one thing," Mike's voice was as sharp as the frosty night. "The Half Moon wagon boss is mortal uneasy since you come back to this range. I am sure he set that long-haired skunk on me. If I ever get right sure of that I will spit in his eye and when he goes for his gun I'll kill him."

"I think his aim was to put the fear of God in any man that rode for me," Ches

said. "There is a reason for that. He will keep till I know what his reason is."

"If Duchain is in any of this deviltry, and you set out to get him—" Mike leaned over and tapped Ches on the arm for emphasis—"give me a hand in the game. I will back any play you make to a finish."

"Why, Mike?" Ches asked. The sudden passion in the boy's voice amazed him. "What is it to you?"

"Oh, nothin' much, except that I despise the ground Duchain walks on," Mike said in a different, a more casual tone. "We better move. Cattle gettin' up on the other side."

UNTIL they were relieved there was no more conversation. A bunch of range stock drifted across the plateau, bulls bellowing challenge to all and sundry. The herd stirred on its fringes. Wild steers arose to sniff and paw and bawl reply. They had to ride, haze off the intruders, turn back beasts that were wakeful and inclined to wander. At one-thirty last guard took their places. They galloped to camp and crept quietly into their blankets among a score of sleeping men in a big tent.

When dawn broke Ches and his men roped out their saddle stock, packed their beds. They trimmed the Half Moon herd of Rolling M's, less than two hundred. A carload or two of beef remained. These the Half Moon would load with the stray shipment.

With fifty-odd horses, four of which carried beds, with Rolling M cattle scattering to graze, Ches and his men watched the Half Moon draw away.

"You three push that stuff along," Ches gave orders. "Turn 'em loose anywhere within five or six miles of home. I'll probably catch you. If not I'll be there tonight."

He turned up the creek. His eye rested on a high leaning peak in the Little Rockies, a needle pinnacle with a strange overhang. It had guided him home many a time, and would have served him still, only now he had fenced meadows to guide him. In an hour he dismounted at the Half Moon. A ranch hand told him his father and brother were both at the house. Ches found them in the living room, toasting their feet before a crackling pine log in the fireplace.

"Round-up about over?" Old Ches asked when his son drew up a chair.

"Far as I'm concerned, yes," Ches answered. "I came over to talk about the result of that. The range has been covered to the rim, some of it twice, since I joined the wagon. Nothing has been overlooked. I'm short over a thousand head of Rolling M cattle."

Old Ches put his hands on his knees. Dick uttered a single expressive "Huh?" and stared at his father.

"It's funny," Ches continued in a matter of fact tone. "When Uncle Bill died you gathered and counted the cattle to appraise the estate. There were then twenty-nine hundred head under the brand. The horses have increased fifty per cent. The stock cattle should have increased anywhere from thirty to seventy-five per cent. I traded you my interest in the Rolling M ranch at your insistence, for the Rolling M brand, on a conservative estimate of not less than three thousand head.

"We both fully expected they would run considerably over that. They should. The calf tally for the last three years would justify that. There have been no hard winters. Yet the outside count of Rolling M's visible on this range is under nineteen hundred. What do you make of it?"

"I don't make anything of it. How can I?" his father replied irritably. "I suppose you consider you've got the worst of the deal as it stands?"

"It would seem as if I have," Ches returned. There was no reproach in his tone, merely the dry statement of fact.

"My offer to buy you out at your own figure still stands," Old Ches said. "I still think it would be better if you were not operatin' on this range."

"I told you I wouldn't sell," Ches declared. "You aren't the only one that

would like me off this range. But I'll get out when I'm ready, not before. I am not bellyaching about being shy a thousand head of cattle. I'm simply asking you what you think of it, that's all."

"You're implyin' that I ought to know about it. Well, I don't," the Old Man growled. "There has been no shrinkage in Half Moon stock. We are brandin' a natural increase in calves, shippin' more beef every season. With as many cattle as I have there is no object in countin' 'em. However—you're dead set to stay with the Rollin' M?"

"I am," Ches said shortly. "Till hell freezes over."

Old Ches reached into a drawer, took out a checkbook, filled in a blank, blotted the ink and handed it to his son.

"I don't want any man to feel that I have cheated him," he said. "A thousand head of range stock is worth eighteen thousand dollars. There you are. Are you satisfied?"

Ches fingered the check a moment.

"I am not," he said deliberately. "I will not be till I find out where those cattle went. I would like to know why you take this way out of it. I would like to know what's come over you that you can be so calm over a bunch of enterprising thieves working this range ever since Baldy Cooper was killed. Is it because so long as they leave Half Moon cattle alone you don't care what other cattle they steal? I would like to know all these things. Also who it is that sends threats through the mail and burns our property. And I am going to find out."

A peculiar silence followed his words. Dick listened intently, leaning forward in his chair. But the Old Man's face was like a stone. Only his eyes went queer. Ches waited. His father said nothing.

Ches stood up.

"What stranglehold has Frank Duchain got on you that you make him a gift of a thirty thousand dollar slice of your outfit?" he demanded hotly. "That you let him have full swing in a country where every man that is a man looks sidewise at him?"

"Damn your impudent soul!" Old Ches roared. "What business have you to meddle in my business? Run your own affairs. Leave mine to me."

"This is my affair. I'm making it mine," Ches stood unruffled. "I'm a Williams. I don't like things I hear whispered about people that raised me. Duchain has you jumping through his hoop. What's he holding over you?"

The harsh angry look faded from the Old Man's face. The thing young Ches saw flicker in his old eyes was fear, fear like a dumb agony.

Dick sprang to his feet.

"I'm sick of it, sick of it," he cried. "You can't fool Ches, dad. He has eyes, and he is using both his eyes and his head. He's a Williams. He has a right to know. Why don't you tell him and be done with it?"

CHAPTER XI

DICK TALKS

"SO YOU see," Old Ches concluded, and his tone was like a sob, "it was the only thing I could do—keep it quiet. I had one son cleared of a killin'—that looked bad enough. I couldn't have my other boy showed up as a cold blooded murderer. A straight fight in which a man gets downed is one thing. Murder is different. I couldn't have cleared him. I fixed it up best I could. I *couldn't* have it known. What people might suspect or think, I had to chance. Men don't act on what they think—only on what they know.

"Even if I could have cleared Dick in a trial it would have meant a private war. Two different men of the Cooper family sent me word. Hen Cooper in the Panhandle an' Long Charlie of Neuces. They was honest about it. They said if they could ever connect Baldy's killin' with the Half Moon they would move on to this range with their guns oiled. I had to shut Duchain's mouth."

He had tears in his voice, in his eyes, and the sight of his grief wrung Ches'

heart. Dick slumped in his chair, chin in his hands, staring at the floor. Ches had listened to something incredible, terrible. It filled him with dismay and a futile anger, because it promised to tie his hands, so that he was in every way helpless to undo what had been done. Yet it seemed to him that something must be done, that the doing lay in his own hands, if he could find a way.

His father was a broken man; Dick a chip helpless on the current his own act had set in motion. In spite of the mixed emotions that rode him as he listened to his father's explanation, his brain functioned with ceaseless inquiry.

"It would have been better," he said at last, "to have come into the open, shame or no shame, Coopers or no Coopers. It would have been hell, I admit, considering the fact. But you let Duchain take you by the throat."

"He has kept his bargain," Old Ches muttered. "I bought him, an' them that was there. He keeps his mouth shut and he handles the work. The Half Moon is goin' ahead. There was no trouble till you come home. I'm tellin' you so you'll lay off. If you ride Duchain because you don't like him it will all come out. And it will be Dick's finish—an' mine. I can't stand up against that."

"So that's why you want me to get off this range," Ches said. "So Duchain won't worry about what I may find out, or what I may do. Well, I'm sorry I can't accommodate you. But I can mind my own business. I think I will go."

The Old Man scarcely seemed to hear him. He stared at the fire, brooding, despondent. He had lived close to threescore years of a life that had brought him triumphs over men, over a material environment. He had fifty thousand cattle under his own brand, thirty thousand acres of virgin soil. He had two sons in the flower of manhood, fine looking, upstanding sons. He was a success as success is measured in the eyes of the world. Yet Ches knew that it was all dust and ashes to him now.

"You've taken the wind out of my sails," Ches said a little wearily. "I'm going home."

He walked out of the house. With his foot on the bottom step, he heard Dick at his elbow. He looked at his brother. He didn't condemn. He didn't regard Dick with abhorrence. Strangely, he didn't feel any diminution of his old regard for Dick. That, he reflected, was queer. Rightly he should have looked at his brother with anger and contempt—and he did feel anger and contempt glow in him like a small clear flame, but it was for another man entirely. He turned to Dick.

"You were drunk and you shot Baldy Cooper down like a dog, without any provocation whatever," he said gravely. "That's a hell of a thing to think of, Dick."

"You don't imagine I find it easy to live with, do you?" Dick returned. "Still I would like to talk to you about this, Ches. I have never been able to talk to the Old Man about it. He rages and shuts me up, or he breaks down like a woman."

"I don't know that I can talk about it either," Ches said dully. "I wanted to marry Vinnie Cooper."

"Oh God," Dick groaned. "I was afraid of that."

"ON SECOND thought," Ches went on, "I wish you would tell me just how the play came up. Somehow when dad was telling it I couldn't take it in. I get it that you shot Cooper, and he has put Duchain, who was a witness to it, in the saddle to shut his mouth. But you wouldn't kill a man drunk or sober for nothing, Dick. Why did you?"

"I don't know," Dick muttered.

"You don't know!" Ches answered scornfully. "Come through. I'm in this as deep as you are."

"I tell you the truth," Dick protested. "I have no recollection of it at all. I was drinking in Saco. I rode out with Duchain, Long-haired Mose and Bob Shields. You can imagine what

shape I was in to be flocking with *them*. I had no use for them. There never is any coherence to the things a man does when he's drunk. The last clear picture of what happened that day is the four of us riding up over the edge of Sun Prairie. The next is of waking up at the Rolling M ranch. It was just after sunrise in the morning. I was on a bunk. Baldy was lying dead on the floor. You could smell the powder yet. They were pouring water on me. They said I shot him and then collapsed."

"But *why* did you shoot him?" Ches persisted.

"I don't know, I tell you," Dick repeated. "I have no recollection—of anything. Not between sunset and sunrise. It's all a blank."

"And so there were three of them who saw it," Ches said. His brows knitted. "How did they account for it?"

"According to them Baldy rode up and came into the house and called us down for being there drunk. I was sitting on the edge of a bunk. I'd been asleep and rose up when he came. I just threw down on him without a word and got him in the neck. Then they said I just lay back on the bunk and they threw water in my face till I came to. He was shot with a .41. I carried the only .41 in the crowd—that little gambler's gun of mine. There was an empty shell in the cylinder. We dug the bullet out of the wall behind where he fell."

"How long after the shooting?"

"A matter of minutes."

"And you were all right when you came out of that? But you couldn't recall anything that had happened?"

Dick nodded.

"And there was nobody else on the ranch?"

"No ranch hands were working there," Dick replied.

"How came Baldy there alone?"

"I never knew. It was spring, remember. Round-up had started. The Half Moon was camped only a few miles away."

"Had you ever had any fuss about anything—anything at all that might have stuck in your crop?"

"No fuss, but—" Dick hung his head—"he told me about a month earlier I better keep away from the Double C unless I was strictly sober. I had a drinking streak on that spring. Somehow, when I got full I always wanted to go to the Double C. I guess it worried Vinnie, or maybe it worried Baldy. I never said a word to her out of the way. And Baldy told me that just like he used to give us kids advice when we were small."

"It didn't make you sore?"

"No. Just ashamed of myself."

"But you went right on tanking up just the same," Ches said bitterly. "Well, then, when you found Cooper was dead what did the four of you do about it?"

"Made medicine about it for an hour or so," Dick told him. "It was a hell of a shock to me. They suggested I could take the stand that I did it in self-defense. But I couldn't go that—even though Duchain declared he had evidence that Baldy was using his scope on the range to get away with stuff. But I didn't believe that—although later he managed to convince the Old Man there was something in it.

"In fact, I was in such a hell of a muddle I couldn't think straight. Finally it was agreed we would say that we rode in at sunrise after laying out on Sun Prairie all night, and found Baldy dead on the floor. So we left Shields there, primed with that yarn and the three of us rode to the home ranch. Mose and Duchain told what happened. It was decided that we should all stick to that story. So it was done that way."

"And so a good man was murdered and on top of that it was whispered around that he was probably shot because he was a thief," Ches summed it up miserably. "And this dirty dog that Baldy Cooper wouldn't ever have around the Half Moon in his lifetime steps into Baldy's boots, because he could get you hanged if he and his tools opened their mouths."

Dick nodded.

"What a rotten mess!" Ches exclaimed. "We're a family to be proud of. Do you believe for a minute Baldy was stealing from us?"

"What difference does it make?" Dick muttered. "I knew nothing about it if he was. I had no justification—I had no reason to even quarrel with him, let alone kill him."

"Well, he was killed and his cattle were stolen. There is no question about that," Ches gritted his teeth. "Left his girl strapped. Oh, I'd like to get hold of something, something I could act on."

"Well, you can take it as positive that the Half Moon didn't get them. Dad said that even if Cooper did drag the long rope we had no right to claim a single hoof of Cooper's stock."

"Yet they disappeared before that season was over," Ches mused. "Somebody got quick action. Lord, oh, Lord!"

"It jolts you? Think that I've had to live with that in my mind for two years," Dick said. "Sometimes I can hardly stand to think of it."

"If the Old Man had to buy off Duchain, why didn't he give him a bunch of money to stay out of the country?" Ches growled.

"You don't really know Frank Duchain," Dick said grimly. "He isn't as easy to handle as you think. He was set on running the Half Moon round-up. I threatened to kill him once. There is something about him that makes me see red—I suppose because of what I know he knows. And he took pains to make it clear to both me and dad that that wouldn't help the Half Moon, because he had a detailed account of the whole business written out, sworn to and signed by Mose Crane and Shields. This was deposited with a lawyer in Helena, to be opened if anything happened to him. He said he was taking no chances with anything or anybody."

"He would play it safe," Ches nodded. "Safe as he knew how. And I guess he has brains. It looks like he has made himself a cinch. It looks like I couldn't do anything, no matter how bad I want to, without ruining you and bringing a disgrace on the Old Man that he couldn't stand."

"To say nothing of yourself."

"It don't matter about me," Ches said.

But that was pure bravado. It mattered so much that his heart felt like a weight in his breast.

They walked slowly toward the stable.

"I'm sorry, Ches," Dick said. There was a choking sound in his voice. "I would have kept it from you. But you were heading straight for trouble with Duchain. You had to know."

"Yes," Ches admitted. "You know it's a queer thing, Dick. I have had a feeling—pure hunch—but it convinced me that Duchain got away with Cooper and with Cooper's cattle. Now it seems I was on the wrong track. I believe your story, Dick. I can't make it seem real. But I guess I will have to stop my gun hand itching every time I am around Frank Duchain. Same time I despise him. He's worse than a blackmailer. He's making this pay him big dividends."

"Yes," Dick said wearily, "that's true."

"Why don't you pull out," Ches demanded. "Start all over somewhere else. Get away from it."

Dick shook his head.

"I can't," he said simply. "I have to stay with the Old Man. He's slipping. He broods too much. He raises hell with me, but he don't want me to go."

"The Half Moon is his life, I suppose," Ches mused. "He built it up from nothing, fought Indians and rustlers and floods and fires to have what he's got. He used to tell us that it was his ambition to have fifty thousand cattle and fifty thousand acres of land to hand on to his sons. And now he figures that both his sons have let him down in his old age. So he considers his life's a failure. But the Half Moon is not a failure. It is still the biggest thing in the country, and he made it what it is. It's natural he wouldn't want to let go."

SO THAT, Ches reflected as he rode east toward the blue contours of the Larb, was why old Ches Williams wouldn't discard Frank Duchain. He couldn't. He didn't dare.

Yet as he turned it over ceaselessly in his mind he questioned more and more. Was that what Vinnie meant when she said, "I can't." Perhaps she had an intuition of the truth—in general, if not in any exact detail. And if in any way she felt the Half Moon to be responsible for her father's death that was a bar sinister against him. A man can not dissociate himself from his family, his class or his tribe.

If he could not move now in the matter of her father's death without bringing disaster to his own people, there was still the question of the Double C cattle. In simple justice he should set that right, if he could find a way. There was still that matter of so many Rolling M cattle whisked into thin air. Ches didn't mean to let that drop.

Nothing strange in thieves abroad on the range. Wherever there is wealth there are men scheming short cuts to its possession. A pearl or a cow, the grain in a farmer's bin, the goods on a merchant's shelves, bonds in a banker's vault —there are always hands outstretched for them.

Thus the cattleman from Texas to the Canadian Northwest had his special predatory types to contend with. Clever men, bold and resourceful. They thought out airtight schemes to work. And though they got short shrift either in the cattlemen's courts or in a clash on the open range, yet here and there some bright unscrupulous mind would continue to disregard the chances in order to increase his stock at some other man's expense.

Ches knew all this. He knew that when cattle vanished unaccountably, one looked sharp for thieves. He couldn't help wondering why his father chose to pay offhand for a thousand cattle instead of flaring up with a curse on rustlers and a promise to lay them by the heels.

"The heart's gone out of him," Ches thought sadly.

His own heart was still strong, although it lay heavy in his breast when he rode into the old Cooper yard and marked Vinnie's face at a window as he passed the house. He felt with a sudden sinking of spirit that it was as if *he* had her father's blood on his own hands.

CHAPTER XII

COOKED UP TESTIMONY

NOVEMBER is an unpredictable month on the Montana plains. Winter, the old graybeard, makes impetuous advances to autumn; and she, the coquette, blows now hot, now cold.

Twice in the last three weeks a light dust of snow had whitened the range, vanishing overnight. Raw winds made the cowpunchers tuck their chins deep in heavy coats one day, to ride the next in shirtsleeves. As Ches came home that evening the sun hung warm in a windless sky, low in the west.

The air was crystal clear. The pines were a brighter green, high on the Larb. The course of Blacktail above and below the ranch flaunted patches of color, yellowed leaves of poplar and willow, scarlet buffalo-berries sweetened by touches of frost, tinges of russet on wild rose and crabapple and plum. The next big wind would strip all but the pines to gaunt skeletons, but it was beautiful now.

The Double C ranch had taken on a new aspect, like a shabby tramp come into money and fresh from a transformation at the hands of barbers and tailors. Bull MacCormack had directed well. A new stable had arisen on the ashes of the firebug's work. Carpenters, labor and lumber had restored buildings, abolished disorder, created new accommodation for man and beast. Long stacks of hay stood behind tight, high pole fences. A new wing had arisen, running out from the old house, in which the cook had now a properly equipped kitchen and mess room. The peeled pine logs shone like layers of

pale gold. A few gallons of red paint gave shingled roofs a warm glow.

The interior had had its innings, too. Ches had seen to that. He hadn't been on the place for weeks, but he had made suggestions to Bull. When he walked into the living room it startled him. It was very much as it had been when Baldy Cooper's family made it a home, and Ches used to ride in, a careless, eager stripling. Chairs, rugs, an odd picture on the wall. Barbaric colored things that caught the eye, brilliant against the dull wood. Some were new, purchased with funds Ches supplied. Some were obviously the belongings of the MacCormack's. And some, Ches could have sworn, were Vinnie's, because he had seen them there before.

The Doyle saddles hung in the stable. Ed and Bob would be loafing in the bunk room.

But Mike Stratton was here playing coon-can with Vinnie on a low table by a glowing fireplace.

"Hello," Mike greeted. "We beat you home."

"I see," Ches answered. "Hello, Vin."

Vinnie looked up from her cards with an odd, shy smile. A man can not, unless he is old and wise and steeped in the salt of life, make his face always a mask when he has tasted bitterness such as Ches had tasted that day. Something about him held Vinnie's gaze. Her eyes asked a question—an involuntary question, Ches thought. Even Mike stared at him. Did he have trouble like that written on his countenance for all men to read? Ches forced a grin.

"He beating you?" he asked casually. "He's a wolf at coon-can. Took a dollar and a half off me the last rainy day."

Vinnie played a card and Mike made a spread triumphantly.

"Coon-can," he declared. "Waiting for that one."

Ches went on through, on his way to the bunk room. Mrs. MacCormack appeared in a doorway.

"How-de-do," Ches greeted her politely.

This tiny woman, he supposed, had decided to take him, a Williams of the Half Moon, on sufferance, or she wouldn't be here keeping the house in order.

"How-de-do," she answered, courteous if not precisely cordial. "George told me to fix up a room for you, Mr. Williams. Here it is."

"Thanks awfully," Ches said. "Have you all got plenty of room?"

"Oh, sure," she said. "There's an extra bedroom besides this."

Ches stood looking about his private quarters with the door closed on himself. For four years he had lived in bunkhouses, round-up camps, hotels. This was better. Comfortable furniture, immaculate cleanness, linen on his bed and soft carpet underfoot.

It somehow gave him a curious sense of intangible security. But he could not abandon himself long to such small raptures. He sat on the side of the bed and found himself back at the Half Moon, listening to his father and Dick, feeling again in a lesser degree the shock of their disclosure. Then he passed to the future. He had some scope there, dealing with the unknown.

While he sat thinking, the supper call came from the mess room. They sat at table as the feudal barons and their retainers sat. A place for Ches at the head, Bull and his wife at one side, Vinnie on the other. Stratton and the two Doyles next, then the punchers line riding from the ranch. Below these four ranch hands. A patriarchal board, with the youngest in years in the master's seat, the first time he had ever presided at his own table.

WHEN they finished they filed silently into the bunk room for a smoke, eleven men all told. Bull MacCormack eyed Ches over a cigaret.

"What you got so heavy on your mind?" he asked at length.

"A craving to sleep, I expect," Ches answered.

"Me too, by gum," Ed Doyle yawned. "Last ten days none of us has been in our

blankets more'n three hours at a stretch. In ten minutes I hit the hay."

"I'm going now," Ches said.

Yet sleep heavy and saddle weary as he was, he lay awake a long time; and he was awake before dawn, hearing the rattle of the cook lighting the fire and the clatter of his pots and pans, the crackle of wood in the fireplace, the footsteps of men going out to feed their horses.

Most of that day he loafed. The line riders went abroad. The Doyles lounged in bunk room, Stratton in the living room joking with Vinnie. Ches flocked by himself. He had no incentive to meddle in ranch details. That was Bull MacCormack's province. There was no pressing task. The bulk of his cattle ranged within ten miles of the ranch, the fringes thrown back daily by his line riders. With the first bad weather he would ride out with every available man, gather and wean his calves, let everything else scatter to face wolves and winter till green grass came again.

But in the meantime he waited, brooding, locked up in himself. For one day, for two days, a week—growing each day more restless.

He avoided Vinnie Cooper. Mike Stratton didn't. They played a perpetual contest of coon-can by the fireplace. They rode abroad during a day or two that glowed warm, with a smoky haze in the air like Indian summer. Once or twice he caught Vinnie staring at him with a puzzled expression. Once she waylaid him.

"It was nice of you to ask me to stay with Mattie and Bull," she said. "It's like old times. I love this old ranch. You're making it what dad hoped to."

"I am making good use of it," Ches answered. "It will be worth more to you when my lease is up."

"It won't be worth much to me without cattle," she reflected. "And I don't feel as if I could ever sell it."

"Maybe by that time," he said, "you will have cattle of your own."

He might accomplish that for her, he reflected, as he rode up along the rim of Blacktail that afternoon. He went up and up among the knobby heights of the Larb, great lumpy hills crowned by patches of pine forest, full of draws masked by thickets where deer lurked. He had a rifle across his saddle fork and he was looking for venison.

HE CAME back at sunset with a six-point buck across his horse and found Shorty MacLean warming his feet by the bunk room fire.

"Hello there, old-timer," Ches hailed him. He asked a question with his eyes and Shorty grinned, nodding imperceptibly as he answered, "H'lo, Ches."

They filed in to supper. Afterward Ches drew Shorty into his own room.

"Well, what did you find out in your travels?"

"Heaps." Shorty spilled Durham into a paper, licked and lit it. "Your hunch was correct—only it didn't take in enough territory."

"Maybe not," Ches admitted. "After all it was just a hunch. Sort of putting two and two together and adding them up on the basis of a supposition."

"It wouldn't surprise me if your final count left you short around fifteen hundred Rollin' M's, eh?" Shorty suggested.

"Probably that. Not less than a thousand, anyway," Ches admitted.

"Well, speakin' of travels, I've been 'round the Horn. Been in Helena, been in Lewistown, been in Fort Benton. Been sojournin' on the Musselshell quite a lot. Was about ready to come home. But I hurried it. Duchain showed up at the Three Links. So I took no chances—burned the earth for here."

"Duchain?"

Shorty nodded.

"Sure. His outfit. He owns it. With a few assorted bad eggs like Mose Crane on his staff. He's there too. Been there since you fellers made him crawfish in Saco. The Three Link Cattle Company is just a blind. It is Duchain's private show."

Ches stared, dumb at this confirmation

of a guess. He knew what was coming next.

"Yump. Duchain is the Three Link. An' the Three Link has over two thousand cattle—most all of which is Rollin' M's and Double C's worked over. Reckon he is all primed to work on the Half Moon now, too. There's quite a bit of stuff—Half Moon cows with unbranded calves, a good many Rolling M's—in the bottoms south of the Little Rockies, all ready to be shoved across for the good of the Three Link as soon as the Missouri freezes. Your hunch was a good one, Ches. That's where all Baldy Cooper's cattle went, an' a right smart bunch of yours. All you got to do is organize an' drop on that outfit like a ton of bricks."

The object, the method, was old as the cattle business. Probably when the Israelites ranged their herds on the plains of Moab they had marks and brands that the Philistines altered surreptitiously, to establish ownership in cattle belonging to the Chosen People. There was nothing new in this scheme which Ches, suspecting, had sent Shorty MacLean forth to affirm. Times without number crooked men on various ranges had devised brands that could artistically be superimposed over the brands of other owners.

No matter that one here and there was shot or hanged when caught in the act, went to the penitentiary if legally convicted, there were always others to discount risks, to plan and contrive and use unlawful irons, because here and there one succeeded—and the loot was rich if a coup went through. Sweated brands, blotted brands, cattle hidden in secluded places till the scars grew out. Cows shot and their unbranded calves sequestered. Beef stock trailed across five hundred miles of range, hidden till altered brands defied identification with the original, then shipped to market. There was probably not a crooked trick with a branding iron, no crafty manipulation of range cattle, that Ches Williams didn't know something about.

It was the same on every range—eternal vigilance the price of ownership. Cattle were wealth that wandered at will under a registered mark. There was always some one who had few or none, who *would* filch from those who had plenty.

Ches got up and walked the floor.

"A week ago I would have whooped," he said at last. "I would have got a couple of stock inspectors, taken the boys and started a clean-up. There is no doubt about this, Shorty?"

"No. I made sure," Shorty replied. "It is a cinch. What ails you?"

"It is like this—" Ches began reluctantly.

Shorty MacLean was old enough to be his father and he had wisdom according to his years. Shorty had to know the dilemma he faced. Sitting on the side of his bed, Ches told him. Shorty's fat lidded eyes narrowed till they were mere steel blue slits when Ches finished.

"Gee whiz!" he whispered. And again, "Great sufferin' snakes!"

"So my hands are tied unless I can figure a way to get at him personally, on the quiet," Ches said. "If I swoop down and arrest him and his gang for stealing cattle, he'll holler. I want to protect myself, but I want more to protect my own folks. I want to get back Vinnie Cooper's stock for her, apart from my own. It's a hell of a situation. I got to think hard before I do anything. It looks right now as if any move I made will let hell loose."

Shorty sat silent, expressionless, for a long time, scratching the half-inch stubble on his chin.

"There is somethin' fishy about this," he said deliberately. "It don't wash. Dick don't know he killed Baldy, you say. He was so gosh darn drunk he don't recollect anythin'. So it rests on their say-so—Shields, Long-haired Mose, Duchain."

"Yes, that's how it stands," Ches replied.

"Take this slant at it," Shorty continued. "Baldy Cooper was cold sober. He was a pretty handy man with a gun.

He was a fast thinker, too. Do you suppose for a minute Dick Williams, or any other man so drunk his mind was a blank, could get his gun out and shoot down that old Texican without Baldy makin' a move in defense?"

"I have thought of that," Ches admitted.

"Better think of it some more," Shorty advised. "Here is another angle! Dick had no reason to shoot Baldy. Even in a quarrel Dick ain't the shootin' kind. But Duchain had reasons. He hated Cooper. Baldy knew him for what he was. He despised people like Frank Duchain an' didn't hide it. It was Duchain's meat to get rid of Cooper if he could, blame it on somebody else. He got away with that before on the Williams family."

"Eh?" Ches looked puzzled.

"I might have told you before," Shorty said, "only I ain't given to unburdenin' my soul. But you've skinned your hand down for me. I'll meet you halfway. You was tried for killin' Jess Ridley. Duchain an' Long Hair testified you shot him in self-defense. But you didn't. You weren't in it. Duchain shot him. It was a cold blooded killin'. I saw it."

"What?"

"I was there," Shorty stated calmly. "If you recollect, I quit the Half Moon about that time. My feet itched. I was headed west with a pack horse. Ridley's place was handy for noon. He had a bad name, which he probably deserved, but I had no personal feelin' about him. It was a place to eat. Well, I rode up behind the house, got off an' walked in the back way.

"Jess was standin' out in the front yard. Duchain an' Mose was sittin' on their horses. They were wranglin'. I got a word or two about some deal they'd been in together an' disagreed about. Ridley was talkin' in his mean way to Duchain. All at once Mose points up the creek an' sez, 'Hey, look at that.' Remember, Ridley was standin' with his hands in his pockets. When he turned his head to look, Duchain shot him. Ridley never knowed what hit him."

"I have suspected that, too," Ches nodded. "Duchain was always afraid of Ridley, for some reason."

"When a man like Duchain has any reason to be afraid of another man, he's goin' to hit at him from behind, every time," Shorty declared. "Well, I had a notion to buy in, for a second," he went on. "But they was all bad eggs; 'twasn't my business to unscramble 'em. So I walked soft-like back to my horse, mounted, dropped into the bed of the creek right back of the house an' rode off without 'em ever dreamin' I was there. I went through the Bear Paws, on west to Sun River Basin. In a month I was in Id-y-ho. I never knowed you was arrested an' tried for that killin' till I come back this summer to work for the Pool."

"SO HE killed him himself," Ches mused. "And when the fool county officers gathered me in for it because I'd had trouble with Ridley, Duchain went to the Old Man and offered to cook up testimony that would clear me. Well, he cleared me all right, in such a way that the killing was credited to me."

"You could have cleared yourself, couldn't you. You wasn't there at all," Shorty said.

"I had an alibi," Ches admitted. "Only I wouldn't have liked to use it. The Old Man ordered me to keep my mouth shut, and it would be all right. The truth is that I was right here at the Cooper ranch all the day Ridley was shot—just me an' Vinnie. I didn't want to drag her into it, unless it was a case of saving my neck. Besides I didn't know what defense they had cooked up for me till the trial come off. All the Old Man would tell me was, 'Keep your damn fool mouth shut an' I'll clear you'."

Shorty nodded.

"Well, then," he said softly. "A man that will commit one murder, a man that will steal, a man that will perjure hisself for pay—why wouldn't he kill another man an' plaster the blame on somebody

else, if that would give him a cinch on somethin' he wanted?"

"Yes. I see that, too," Ches said. "But there are three of them to swear to it. Dick can't swear to anything. Oh, I've got to do something about this, if I can figure a way. Duchain has got away with enough."

"We'll figure a way," Shorty responded, brightening. "We can take him on this brand workin' any time. I *sabe* how you feel about it, Ches. Me, I'd go for him an' kill the dirty dog, an' let the horns an' tail go with the hide. You stay here an' he'll get you. He's afraid of you. Them few days with the Half Moon showed me that."

"And if he doesn't, maybe some Cooper will," Ches hazarded. "There might be something in that, Shorty."

Shorty leaned suddenly to the window, flattened his nose to peer into the dark.

"Whisper them things," he lowered his voice. "That window sash was up a mite. I thought I heard somethin'. I should have told you when you started to talk. Any of Baldy's kin would start gunnin' for you or the Half Moon alike if they had anythin' to go on like you've been tellin' me. You got Cooper's kin around you. I didn't know who Bull MacCormack was till I rode in here tonight. He don't know me, but I know him."

"He's married to a niece of Baldy's. I know that," Ches said.

"Niece nothin'. Bull MacCormack is Baldy Cooper's youngest brother. I know."

"Bull is Baldy's brother?" Ches repeated incredulously.

"Sure. I knew him the minute I laid eyes on him, but I didn't let him know it. You keep a tight lip, or there'll be a lot of sudden death around these parts. There may be more Coopers up here layin' low. They're like the Scotch. They never forget an' they never forgive. I know 'em. I was raised in the Cooper country, down South.

"Baldy was well thought of among his own people. He was killed. His stock was stolen; his daughter left strapped. Don't you think for a minute Coopers' kinfolk will ever let anybody get away with that. They'll play even if they wait ten years. But I don't take no stock in these cheap threats by mail, nor burnin' haystacks. When these Coopers go on the warpath it'll be public—not from ambush."

"Let's sleep on it," Ches said wearily.

"Good. I can stand to bog down in the blankets m'self," Shorty agreed. "Don't brood over this, Ches. It'll all come out in the wash."

Yes, Ches reflected bitterly, when the door closed on Shorty MacLean. But who wants to wash his dirty linen in the sight of a gaping world? He could understand better his father's dread of the club Duchain held over them. Ches feared it himself, mostly because of the fresh faced girl whose voice he could hear faintly in the other room through thick log walls.

Should he on that account permit thieves to flourish, and a scoundrel like Duchain wax great with plunder?

CHAPTER XIII

THREE LINKS

"THERE is no question about the stuff in these flats," Ches said. "It is a made to order play. I remember now that when we worked round-up along the head of these breaks, Duchain turned all my men off in a bunch. *His* crowd rode these river bottoms, took out the beef and left everything else. It has been done before, plenty. Mark Steele worked it to a fare-you-well on the Block S in the Bear Paws. I think I will put this up to the Old Man and Dick when we get back."

"Then we might as well go back right now," Shorty suggested.

They sat their horses on the brink of the Missouri River. The valley wall, an earthen cliff five hundred feet high, notched by a score of cañons, lifted behind them. A northeast wind whooped with forlorn whinings over the maze of the Bad Lands. The ground was like iron

under foot. All day the frost had bitten deep. Slaty clouds raced above. When the gaps of blue closed to shut out the sun, when that sky was banked solid, snow would drive like white sand.

"Not yet," Ches said. "I'm going across."

"You're the doctor," Shorty said. "I'm with you. But if we run into Duchain with any of his crowd, maybe we'll have our troubles gettin' back. I'm tellin' you."

"I'm going just the same," Ches replied. "Got to see for myself."

"We oughto brought some of the boys along," Shorty grumbled. "Bob an' Ed an' that Stratton kid. He's a wolf, that boy, I'd say. This would be his meat."

"Ed and Bob had to go home for a spell," Ches explained. "And I'm glad Mike went to Saco. I'd have been tempted to bring him along. If Long-haired Mose is over the river, and he got sight of Stratton, he'd lay for the kid. You and I can do all the looking."

"Mose may lay for you. So might Duchain. You're bigger game than that Stratton kid," Shorty pointed out.

"I'll take a chance," Ches answered shortly.

"Well, I don't reckon our bein' south of the river will start a war," Shorty grinned. "If it does—"

He shrugged his thick shoulders.

"Gosh darn it, that's a cold wind," he complained. "Say, if we're goin' across, Ches, let's go straight to the Three Link tonight. Let's ride right in among these thieves. Let 'em think what they want. Let's sleep warm in their bunkhouse tonight instead of on frozen ground. We can keep our guns handy."

"Why not?" Ches answered. "If it gives them something to think about, so much to the good. They won't be as suspicious as if they spot us prowling their range."

"All right. Let's fly at it," Shorty urged.

They dipped into the river on a gravel bar that slanted upstream. The current swirled at their saddle skirts. But a horse could keep his feet; it was a true ford. They emerged dripping, and the drip froze in crisp ice where it splattered on chaps and stirrups and hairy fetlocks.

A narrow bottom lay along the south shore; above that the high banks and the Bad Lands. This sage grown flat was dotted with grazing cattle. Three Links, Three Links. Here and there Ches' keen eye could detect an unnatural thickness in the brand, a blurring of true curves that should have stood sharp and clean on the hide. Nevertheless it was neat work. If it aroused no suspicion, it would pass anywhere. But they both knew that to kill any one of those beasts and strip off the hide would show on the flesh side the old scars and the new that formed the completed Three Link brand.

Shorty's prying left no room for doubt of ownership. The Three Link was Duchain's. He hadn't bought these cattle. They were stolen.

Arrest and prosecution meant certain conviction. The rustler's game depended on lack of suspicion. Once cattlemen got on his trail he was lost. Because a worked brand can be proven worked, just as any forgery can be proven, and a rustler can not legitimately account for possession of cattle he has neither bought nor bred. He is like the bank teller on a moderate living wage who suddenly blossoms out with a country estate, and other expensive luxuries. Duchain had played this on too large a scale, probably because he felt secure.

SHORTY and Ches turned out of this river bottom into the wide mouth of a cañon. South of the river the Bad Lands spread as they did to the north, a thirty-mile fringe of fantastic contours, a nightmare topography, as if some prehistoric engraver had carved the bordering plains with every tool at his command while he was suffering from dementia. Yet there was abundant shelter for stock in that strange maze—bunch grass on narrow plateaus, springs of clear water as well as bitter alkali. Sidehills nursed patches of scrubby pine. Lodge-

pole grew here and there, slender tuft topped trees like black ostrich plumes against the winter sky.

"Up this cañon a couple miles is a draw to the divide between this an' the Musselshell," Shorty said. "I remember it. Once on top, we can ride east an' drop into the valley."

Ches nodded. Cattle scurried before them. Other bunches stood to watch them pass, heads up, eyes staring. Once a family of deer bounded across the narrowing bottom—a buck, two does and three fawns—to vanish in a gully. Once a band of antelope met them at a bend, whistled and turned tail, white rumps like flags of truce as they disappeared at incredible speed.

"Good country for any kind of monkey business," Shorty MacLean remarked. "Nothin' for a hundred miles east, west or south. An' a river that's seldom crossed."

"Sure is," Ches replied absently. He was thinking of Vinnie Cooper.

He was still thinking of her with that queer little ache that came into his heart now and then, when they turned into a ravine that branched east from the cañon. It was stiff climbing. Their horses buckled into the slope like goats. Here and there the gully narrowed to a stony cleft where they perforce dismounted and scrambled, reins in hand, to get up at all.

In the end it gave on a narrow, level bench. From the eastern rim of that, the Musselshell looped in silver curves over the gray floor of a valley. The northeast wind drove at them full lunged, sharp toothed, as they stood to let their panting horses draw breath after the climb. A hundred yards or so away a stretch of pine bent to the gale, a tiny forest that dipped a little way down the slope and masked the rim of the valley for a quarter mile.

"There is a cabin right below on the river," Shorty said. "We can camp there if we want. The closer we get to the Three Links, Ches, the less I like it."

Ches followed his outstretched hand. He could see the cabin. He sat silent, debating the wisdom of riding into a nest of thieves, even though they could no more than suspect his errand. After all what more could he and Shorty accomplish? He knew enough. He could put the machinery of organized law into action with a word. He could gather his riders and work justice himself on the Musselshell, and take those stolen cattle forthwith. Or he could consider the weapon Duchain held in his hands, and let it lie.

A man's thought covers a wide span in a brief time. Ches saw the cabin by the river. He let these things run through his mind. He uttered the first phrase of a reply.

Two rifle shots punctuated his words. Something like the prick of a red hot needle stung him in the side. He saw Shorty's horse go down on his knees, roll on his side, and Shorty cast himself nim' bly free from the collapsing beast. Another shot, a fourth and fifth. Chesshorse plunged. The bullets had whistled close.

SHORTY huddled in the long grass. "Git to the timber. I'm all right," he snarled. "They're in that. Git to the upper end an' head 'em off when they run."

A bullet whanged on the steel fork of Ches' saddle and a flying fragment nicked his hand. He bent low, his black horse stretched in tremendous bounds. Once screened by those pines—

Ches Williams had a brain that functioned fast. That pin-prick in his side burned less fiercely than his anger. He skirted the lower edge of the timber at a gallop. Branches slapped him smartly across the face. He rode a fast horse and all about that pine patch the valley wall and the bench on the west lay open as a ballroom. Hoofs made no sound on pine needles. He passed like a wraith, an avenging wraith that carried a Winchester carbine poised in one hand.

He pulled up with a jerk at the far end. Silenee. Emptiness. The wind whistled over his head. Whatever that stretch of

scrub forest held, nothing moved before his eyes. So they were still in that cover. Good. Bushwhackers between two fires, Shorty and himself.

Ches sat his horse in the edge of a sapling thicket on the rim of the plateau. He commanded the bank above and the slope below. He knew that Shorty lay in that bunchgrass at the other end, with his moon face cocked over the barrel of a rifle.

For five minutes—ten—Ches waited, straining his ears, eyes roving. A sharp report, like the crack of a muleskinner's whip, or the breaking of a frosty branch, broke that silence at last. Presently, in the hush that followed, Ches could hear the dull patter of hoofs, of one horse only, coming over that carpet of pine needles. Very close, or he could not have heard at all, he knew.

He slipped out of his saddle, stepped quickly to the outer edge of the thicket. He was barely in the clear when a rider broke from cover fifty yards below, bending low on a horse running as if the hounds of hell were at his tail.

Who he was or what he did there, Ches did not stay to reason. He dropped to his haunches and brought the sights in line.

He could have killed the man. Even in that tense moment he had a twinge of regret for the horse. But he wanted the man alive, and so held low on the flying beast when he pulled.

The brute curled his fore legs, came down on his head and shoulders, turned twice like a rolling stone before he came to his last stop. And his rider sailed through the air like a diver from his springboard. He, too, came down head first on ground hardened by frost. And while his mount threshed feebly in its dying agony, the man lay like a log when Ches ran to disarm him.

He knew the man indeed, while he was yet in mid air, for as he was falling his hat flew wide and long black locks spread fanwise.

"So it's you, you long-haired tarantula," Ches muttered. "You'll get your hair and your claws cut this time for sure."

He took away Mose Crane's belt, searched him for concealed weapons, discovering a short gun in a Texas holster under one armpit inside his shirt. After which he turned Mose on his face and tied his arms tightly behind his back. Then he tried to revive him, the method being to poke him roughly in the ribs with the toe of his boot.

Mose had landed hard. He didn't stir. Ches desisted. Incidentally he began to feel rather sick and strangely weak. He sat down, staring at the seepage of blood over his boot with a stupid sort of surprise. And he wondered why Shorty didn't turn up, without its occurring to him that an enemy might come instead of Shorty MacLean.

Then he heard a voice in the timber hailing him—Shorty's lusty shout. He answered:

"Yoo-hoo! Come on. I got one."

"I got one, too," Shorty bellowed as he broke out of the pines, mounted on a strange horse—a Three Link horse.

"Got him alive, eh? That nice, kind *hombre* laid out cold. Too bad," Shorty mocked. "By gosh, you're hit!"

His eye marked the blood.

"Nothin' to get excited about," Ches said. "It can't amount to much, because they pinked me when they downed your horse. If it was fatal I wouldn't have been able to get here. I feel a little bit funny right now, that's all."

"Lemme look."

Shorty opened up Ches' coat and shirt. He grunted.

"Tore hell outa a rib," said he. "It'll be darned sore. An' you gotta git it 'tended to *pronto*. Aha!"

Crane stirred. Shorty turned him over, helped him to a sitting posture. He glared at Ches and Shorty.

"Shall we wait for the boys, or hang him right here to one of these pines?" Shorty asked pleasantly. "You were plumb foolish, Ches, to shoot a good horse instead of a no-account skunk like him. Now, me, I didn't shoot no horse."

"No," Ches followed Shorty's lead. "We'll take him in and let the sheriff hang him on a regular scaffold at Glasgow."

"Hang me?" Mose found his voice in protest. "What for? Man's got a right to defend himself."

"Oh, nobody would bother you for a little thing like that," Ches went on. "Of course you were perfectly justified in shooting me in the ribs and trying to plug Shorty MacLean as well as his horse, from ambush. Sure. Besides that isn't the first time you've taken a crack at me from under cover. I don't mind that. But it will be the last. You're going to the county seat of Vale County—if, as Shorty says, we can keep the boys from stringing you up offhand. You'll be tried, and afterward you will be hung by the neck, Mose, till you are dead, all legal and proper, for a dirty murder."

"I never murdered nobody," Mose whined.

"Yes, you did," Ches snarled at him. "You shot Baldy Cooper cold blooded, at the Rolling M two years back."

"I didn't," Mose denied. "You'll never make that stick. Where'd you get that idea?"

"From Frank Duchain," Ches said crisply. "He ought to know. He was there. He says you shot Baldy."

"Duchain says *I* shot Baldy Cooper!" Crane opened his mouth like a fish. "Duchain!"

"So he says," Ches nodded.

"It's a lie!" Long-haired Mose shouted. His voice rose to a scream, high pitched, hysterical, terrible to hear from a man's lips. "He's a liar! Duchain shot Baldy Cooper himself. Shot him with your brother's little .41 when Dick was dead to the world. I didn't do it. I can swear to that on a stack of Bibles. He ain't goin' to put it off on me. By God, if Duchain says I did it you let me at him! You ask Bob Shields. He was there, too."

"Yes?" Ches stumbled to his feet. "Sure, Mr. Shields will get a chance to say his say, too, when we finish this Three Link round-up. Funny about Baldy Cooper, though. Duchain says you did it. You say he did. Maybe you're both lying—same as you both were when you told the Old Man Dick did the shooting."

"Duchain shot him. I tell you. It was his play." The words tumbled pell-mell out of Crane, in his eagerness to absolve himself. "He'd been waitin' a chance, figurin' out a way. When he saw Cooper ridin' in to the Rollin' M ranch alone, an' Dick Williams laid out dead to the world, he said it was his chance. He took Dick's gun outa his holster, sat on the bunk in front of Dick with the .41 between his knees. When Baldy walked in he downed him without a word. Then he woke Dick up an' made out that Dick done it himself.

"Duchain reckoned the Old Man would want it kept quiet. Duchain rebranded some calves to make the play strong when he made his talk to Old Man Williams that Baldy Cooper was really double-crossin' the Half Moon. That's how he got to be range boss. He's got fat off it. Damn his soul, he can't blame no killin' off on me! If he's lettin' me in for it I can prove it on him. Me'n' Shields was witnesses. Duchain's a killer an' a thief. I knew some day he'd give me the worst of it. To hell with him! He's got me in trouble enough, doin' his dirty work. He's got me in trouble enough, without palmin' off his own murders on me."

"We won't argue it," Ches said quietly. "You can tell it to the judge and jury—if the boys don't hang you the minute they gather around. You have sure come to the end of your rope, Mose."

Crane shuddered, squatting in the grass.

"It wasn't a square deal," he whined. "I only done what he made me. He was always runnin' me up against trouble. Where is he?"

"He's where he'll keep," Ches said.

Over Mose Crane's head Ches winked broadly at Shorty MacLean, who was still a little dumfounded at the unexpected tack Ches had taken, but quite alert to

what Ches had accomplished in wringing that admission from Long haired Mose. But Shorty didn't let a momentary triumph blind him.

"Let's get down to that cabin," he said peremptorily. "You got to be 'tended to."

DOWN that mile of windswept valley wall they moved at Mose Crane's walking pace. Once or twice on the steep slope, handicapped by his lashed wrists and high heeled boots, he stumbled and fell. They waited till he rose, and went on, implacable as death behind him, Shorty MacLean on the Three Link horse, Ches sick and dizzy in his own saddle. Blood soaked his side, his leg, filled his boot, for all he pressed one hand tight over the wound. It burned and ached intolerably now. But he could ride.

At last they came to a log cabin on the river bank. A small stable stood near, with musty hay in one corner. A pile of firewood lay by a crude fireplace.

An ancient coal-oil can served Shorty for a pail to bring water in. He stripped the clothes off Ches, washed his side clean.

"She gouged pretty deep," he complained. "An' you have sure been liberal about sheddin' your life blood. You'll probably be gosh darned sore in the mornin'."

Antiseptics they had none. But the prickly pear, the flat-leaved cactus of the plains, grew all about. Shorty trimmed the spines from two segments, mashed them to a pulp like cucumber paste and bandaged this over the wound with strips torn from a clean shirt. The prickly pear poultice, he said, would draw a tooth. It was cool, soothing to lacerated flesh.

They had blankets wrapped in slickers on their saddles, food in saddle pockets. They ate, sharing their grub with the cowed man whose lank black hair spread like a woman's over his shoulders.

"Know the fellow you downed?" Ches asked Shorty.

"One of the Three Link crowd," Shorty answered. "I made a good shot, considerin' the timber."

Ches lay resting in a bunk. Weak and weary, the pain easing slightly, he dozed off. When he wakened later the glow of the fireplace showed him Mose Crane stretched on the opposite bunk, an ankle roped to each footpost of the rude frame. In a dusky place beyond the firelight was a dim bulk—Shorty MacLean with a carbine across his knees. There were two small windows in the cabin. Each was shrouded with a saddle blanket. Ches smiled, gritted his teeth at pain that stabbed him when he shifted his body and presently slept again. How long he did not know. He was wakened by a voice outside, saying:

"Hey! You in there, Ches? Ches Williams!"

The fire had sunk to a small heap of coals, a ruby cluster in the black. Ches couldn't see either Crane or Shorty now. But when he stirred, making the bunk boards creak a little as he laid hold of his six-shooter, from Shorty's corner came a warning "S-s-sh!"

Shorty didn't answer that voice, for precisely the same reason that Ches slowly and with pain drew himself to a sitting posture, so that he could level a gun, with his shoulders propped against the log wall. They were well within the enemy lines. If Frank Duchain were still south of the river and Three Link men had them cornered in that cabin—well, the seventeenth century buccaneers were not the only folk who proceeded on the assumption that dead men tell no tales.

Yet there was a strangely familiar note in the voice that demanded again to know if Ches Williams were within. Friend or enemy, he knew who was there. And Ches was no shrinking violet. He answered:

"I'm here. Who are you? What do you want?"

"It's Mike—Mike Stratton. Are you all right, Ches? Can I come in?"

"If your intentions are strictly honorable," Shorty answered with a chuckle of relief. "Anybody else with you?"

"No. Just me," Mike said.

"Is it the kid?" Shorty had crossed softly to whisper.

"Sure. I know his voice."

"What's he doin' over here when he's supposed to be in Saco?" Shorty grunted. "Reckon it's all right?"

"Yes," Ches declared. "Let him in."

HE HEARD the creak of the wooden latch under Shorty's hand, the noise of the door as it swung. Massed clouds above, the depth and shadow of the valley made the night one with the cabin interior. Very faintly Ches thought to distinguish that opening. He was wary. He knew Shorty was backed into a corner of that gloom, taking no chances. But this time there was no doubt. Mike's voice came low and clear, touched with anxiety.

"You hurt, Ches?" he asked. "Who's with you?"

"Scratched, that's all," Ches replied. "I got a partner."

"Have you got the windows blanketed?" Mike asked. "Is it all right to strike a light?"

"Yump. But close that door first," Shorty spoke.

The door creaked. A match snapped. In the yellow flare Mike stood revealed, slim, erect in leather chaps and short sheepskin coat, a rifle in his hand.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said he, marking Mose Crane, blinking with lifted head from the bunk. "You got *that*, did you? Good. How bad you hurt, Ches?"

"Not bad," Ches assured him. "How did you know I was here? How did you know I was hurt?"

The match guttered in Mike's fingers.

"I smelled smoke from this chimney," he explained. "So I sneaked up to the stable an' looked over your outfit. I knew your saddle, Ches. It's all bloody. I was leery. A Rollin' M horse an' a Three Link in the same stable didn't look good to me."

"I'll stir up the fire," Shorty said, "whilst you give an account of yourself, young feller. You're supposed to be in Saco."

"My feet are half froze," Mike said. "An' I got a prisoner outside with his legs tied under a horse's belly. I better bring him in."

"Who is it?" Ches asked.

"Bob Shields. Runnin' mate to what you got tied up there."

"What do you aim to do with Shields?" Shorty inquired.

"Take him over to the county seat," Mike's voice sounded harsh coming out of the dark. "He will go to the pen or be hung."

"By God!" Ches burst out. "You have Shields. We have Long-haired Mose. We only lack Duchain to make the gathering complete."

There was a momentary silence. Then Mike said—

"I have killed Frank Duchain."

CHAPTER XIV

THE CLEAN-UP

THE FIREPLACE blazed up under Shorty's touch. In a few minutes Mike came back. Ahead of him walked Bob Shields, his face bleak, one hand swathed in a bloody bandage.

"Get up to the fire an' warm yourself," Mike commanded.

Shields huddled by the blaze. Once he touched his hand against the wall in moving and a groan came from his lips.

"His gun hand's smashed," Mike answered Shorty's look of inquiry. "I fixed it up as good as he'll get till he sees a sawbones. He's lucky, at that."

Ches lay on his bed staring at them, thinking. So Duchain was dead. Mike had eliminated him. What was Mike doing south of the river? How did he come bringing a prisoner, the third of that unholy trinity? But Ches was too weak and ill at ease to waste much strength in useless speculation. Mike would talk in his own good time. There was a good deal to be said that had better not be said, perhaps, where Mose Crane or Shields could hear. But Ches knew that whatever the outcome, the combination that

harassed the Half Moon range was finally disrupted.

Mike did not elect to talk. He sat humped over the fire. Shorty put on coffee. Mike and his prisoner ate.

The fire died down again. Ches gradually became drowsy, slept. He was wakened at a noise. Shorty was stirring the fire. Ches looked at his watch. Five-thirty. Not long to daybreak. Mike Stratton rose from where he had stretched on the earth floor.

"How do you feel?" Shorty asked Ches.

"Tough," Ches admitted. "But we had better move. We better head straight for the Half Moon."

"Once across the river," Shorty said, "we can make a *travois* an' haul you, if you can't ride."

"I can ride," Ches said.

And ride he did, though every footfall of his horse stabbed him like a knife until his head whirled, and nausea seized him. But he rode. They left the cabin when a pale streak lighted the eastern edge of a frowning sky. Shields and Crane rode double on one horse. Mike had a pack pony, which Ches could not recall Mike's leading from the Double C when he left for Saco.

They made the Missouri in three hours, crossed on the gravel ford. Stiffened so that every movement was an agony, weakened from loss of blood, Ches couldn't hold his feet clear of the current that lapped at his horse's ribs. He was wet to his knees when they drew out on the north shore. And it was freezing. They stopped to empty his boots and put dry socks on him. In the midst of that Ches keeled over, the sage flats and the river bank and the far loom of the Little Rockies spinning in a dizzy swirl.

He shook that off. They helped him to his saddle. Thereafter he rode in a semi-daze through what seemed eons of time. The landscape blurred now and then, his companions momentarily seemed shadowy, formless shapes, their voices strangely distant. Yet he kept his seat. In the end they came to the fenced meadows on Serviceberry and so to the home ranch of the Half Moon.

HANDS lifted Ches from his saddle and carried him up to the porch, into the living room and laid him on a couch. His father stood over him, dumbly troubled. Dick brought him a drink of whisky.

"Throw this into you," he said.

"Take these two hydrophobia skunks down into the cellar and lock the door on them for the present," Ches said after a minute. "I don't reckon they'll bust through those stone walls."

"I don't know what it's all about," Dick answered. "But I'll put them underground more cheerfully than anything I can think of, unless it would be to put them underground permanently. I take it that you want 'em kept safe and sound."

"Yes," Ches mustered a feeble grin. "They are going to be useful to us."

"You tell him, Shorty," he motioned to his father. "And Mike, I guess, has something to say, too."

Shorty, his spurred feet crossed, his dumpy body bulging an upholstered chair, told in crisp vernacular the story Ches was too weak to relate. And Old Ches listened with a flush mounting in his seamed face, the glint of a growing anger making his eyes bright.

The words began to grow fuzzy to Ches. Try as he would he began to drift away from there. And finally he was gone altogether, alone in a fog where there was neither voice nor vision nor consciousness.

He did not, however, drift far or into the unknown. When he took note of things again he was fairly comfortable in a bed he had not slept in for four years, in a room that was precisely as he left it that long ago. His father was sitting with his hand on the counterpane. A lamp burned on a table.

"Don't you try to talk now, son," he advised at the first blink of Ches' eyelids. "And don't you worry. You have done a good job, and I have not lost my grip altogether. This mess is goin' to be

cleared up quick. There'll be a doctor out from Glasgow as fast as horses can bring him. Them two is on their way to jail. An'—"

"Who took them?" Ches inquired.

"Dick and Shorty," his father answered.

He bit off a cigar end with cool deliberation. The first real smile Ches had seen on his face that summer flickered for a moment.

"You done took a load off'n me, Ches, that was breakin' me down," he said at last. "Anythin' I got that you want you can have an' welcome. I'm plumb proud of you. An' I'll see that Shorty an' this Stratton boy don't lose nothin' by it."

"I'll tell you what I want," Ches said slowly.

"Name your poison," the Old Man grinned. "I'm willin' to take a back seat an' let you an' Dick do what you like with the Half Moon."

"I want an egg fried in butter—no, two eggs," Ches smiled. "And some toast and coffee."

"You son-of-a-gun," the Old Man laughed. "You sure that's all you want?"

"I feel a heap more like myself, and I'm hungry," Ches said. "Where's Mike?"

"Over in the bunkhouse, I expect," the Old Man said as he rose to deliver that order to the house cook. "Want to see him?"

Ches nodded.

"I'll send him up," old Ches said. "All wool an' a yard wide, that kid. You certainly have a knack of pickin' men, m'son."

MIKE came softly into the room a little later. He was altered. Even by the soft light of the lamp Ches could detect that. That strange concentration, that sometimes made him pucker his brows and draw his mouth to a tight slit, was gone. He was like any other careless youth, sunny faced. His eyes laughed, that used to be hard, sometimes burning.

"Well, old-timer," he greeted Ches. "You don't look like you'd be meat for the undertaker yet awhile."

"No," Ches assured him. "Not yet awhile. Yesterday was pretty hazy in spots, but I'm beginning to take notice again. I have not got that hot iron feeling in my side any more. What time is it, anyway?"

"It is just about daylight. I only got up a little while ago," Mike said. "I expect our friends are pretty close to Glasgow now. They left an hour after we got you in bed, with a good team on a spring wagon."

"Say, Mike," Ches asked, "how come you horned into things over the river, single handed, without a word to anybody?"

Mike planted himself in a chair. He looked thoughtfully at Ches.

"I have a head and sometimes I use it for somethin' besides a place to hang my hat," he said at last. "I saw them odd Three Links in the round-up. I had the feeling that Duchain was a natural thief. He had somethin' agin you, or he was scared of you for some reason. There was too much of a dead set at you an' everybody that worked for you as soon as you started to take over the Rollin' M cattle.

"More'n that, I knew about these Double C's of Cooper's vanishin' in midseason. Tell the truth, I was more interested in the Double C's than the Rollin' M's. I figured over the river was the answer. That's all. Bumpin' into Duchain was part of the play. I got him, an' collared Shields. An' Shields talked. Gosh yes, he talked all right. So I started home with him. I reckoned you'd be pleased with what he had to say."

"You're reasoning was sound," Ches agreed. "But why did you take such chances alone?"

"Mostly on Vinnie Cooper's account," Mike said frankly. "She's had a tough deal. Her father murdered. Her cattle stole. If I could look into that an' maybe get track of somethin' I reckoned it worth any chance I might take. I think a heap of Vinnie Cooper."

"Well, she's worth it," Ches said gravely. "And I wish you both all the luck there is. Only I would like to have beaten you to Frank Duchain."

"It happened to be my luck," Mike answered soberly. "And I am glad it was."

Ches lay staring up at the ceiling. Mike was luckier than he knew. He could see as plainly as if it were before his eyes Vinnie lifting her face to Mike's kiss on the steps of that railway coach. If Ches was envious, it was not a grudging envy. It hurt, that was all.

"I think I'll bust on over to the ranch as soon as it breaks day," Mike said presently.

"You can tell Vinnie that as soon as we can make a round-up on the Musselshell she will get her cattle back," Ches told him. "We will take every hoof under the Three Link brand. They are all stolen stock."

"Sure, I'll tell her," Mike grinned. "Anythin' else?"

"Well yes," Ches forced himself to shove emotion into the background and be practical. "Straightening out this Three Link business is only a matter of form, now. And the weather looks like it might turn bad. You and the boys had better start gathering calves. Any thin looking cows you better leave in the pastures, too. We have lots of hay. You can mount those ranch hands and Bull can ride for a few days. You're in charge of the range end of the Rolling M till I get on my feet again. Shorty I will send across the river with the stock inspectors and a crew."

"All right," Mike nodded. "I'll keep things movin'. So long."

AS MIKE passed out a rotund Chinaman came bearing a tray. Old Ches followed Chung in. And now with the food before him Ches couldn't eat. He drank the coffee, picked at the crisp toast. A queer lassitude crept over him. He felt heavy and forlorn, as he remembered feeling when he was very small at the infliction of punishment for juvenile misdeeds; much as if he had been sent to bed in the dark when he craved lamplight.

Only now the dark was welcome. He wanted to lie still with his eyes shut and fight the thing out for himself. He didn't want to talk. And as if the father could read his son's mind, old Ches presently turned the lamp low and slipped out of the room.

Yet there was a lot of satisfaction in definite accomplishment despite that bleak sense of loss when he thought of Vinnie Cooper. He had beaten a tough combination, laid an ugly ghost, blown away the cloud that lay on his father and Dick. To bring order out of disorder, to make truth and decency prevail over unscrupulous cunning is an achievement that warms any man. So Ches in the end solaced himself and fell asleep once more.

Late in the afternoon of that day a doctor arrived from the county seat. He examined the wound, jocularly remarked that he had traveled a fifty miles in a buggy for nothing, because a clean surface wound on a healthy man heals by first intention—which, he facetiously explained, was *not* the sort of intention the road to hell is paved with.

Ches lay in his bed growing stronger with each twenty-four hours, and more impatient. Shorty MacLean and Dick came back from town and vanished again to the Musselshell with a somewhat depleted crew of Half Moon riders. For curiously, of the men who worked under Duchain for the Williams outfit, five disappeared after dusk of the day Long-haired Mose and Bob Shields were brought prisoners to the ranch.

Before Shorty went, however, he told Ches what Bob Shields, suffering with the pain of his shattered hand and the fear of God and the law in his lawless soul, told him as they drove to town.

"Stratton rode into the Three Link just after dusk," Shorty said. "Duchain was there. Mike swung off his horse, walked into the bunkhouse. Says he, 'Duchain, I'm here to pay a debt,' an' reaches for his gun. He got Duchain first crack,

winged two of the others, shot the gun outa Shields' hand when he could 'a' killed him just as easy. The other *hombre* broke out through the window an' I expect he's runnin' yet.

"Here's the funny part of it. Soon as he got Shields away from the Three Link, he went after him about what happened at the Rollin' M ranch two years ago. He seemed to know just what *did* happen —I mean that Duchain actually killed Baldy Cooper hisself. An' of course Shields coughed up all he knew, seein' Duchain was dead.

"You got to hand it to that kid for cold nerve. I ain't no pilgrim myself an' I'm here to tell you I'd hesitate to walk in on five hard pills an' begin shootin' with the idea I was goin' to walk out when I got through. But how in blazes did *he* know just how they got Baldy?"

Ches shook his head.

"Funny," he said. "We didn't know, till I got it out of Mose Crane on a bluff. I'll have to ask Mike when I see him."

THAT OPPORTUNITY didn't come soon. The first November snow drifted down in eddying flakes out of a murky sky. As the frost tightened and the wind grew, the snowfall became a blizzard, the air full of swirling white particles. For a day or two after this onslaught the world was white and shining. Then the west wind began to sigh, warmed to a chinook that fanned the plains with its breath till water ran in every hollow and the range was clear again.

Before the chinook came Ches got out of his bed and took to sitting in a chair by the fireplace in the big room. His father looked at him one afternoon from a seat opposite and said:

"Will you take hold of the range end in the spring, Ches? I can give Dick pointers on the business part. The Half Moon is a pretty big thing, Ches. You'll have absolutely a free hand."

Six months earlier Ches would have thrilled to that prospect. Now he looked into the fire glow and muttered:

"I don't know, dad. I don't want to promise, right now."

"Why not?" his father urged. "Your own stuff can be handled just the same."

"It wouldn't seem reasonable if I told you," Ches said. "I started out with ideas about building up the Rolling M just like you built up the Half Moon. Yet right now I don't know if I want to stay with it—if I want to stay with the cow business at all. I'll give you a definite answer by and by. But if I don't, why not make a range boss of Mike Stratton? You'll never get a better man. I'd say Shorty MacLean, but Shorty is just as apt to want to head for New Mexico or some other seaport after one season here."

"I think I know how to anchor Shorty," Williams senior said thoughtfully. "And I will think about this Stratton kid, if you won't follow in my footsteps. I'd like it if you would, Ches. It won't be so many years till it all goes to you an' Dick anyway."

"Shucks, don't talk like that," Ches remonstrated. "We'll see. It'll be a month before I can ride. It's a long time till spring."

Yes, it was a long time till spring. Looking out the east window from his chair by the fireside, Ches could see the humpy outline of the Larb thirty miles away. His men rode home with wild cattle streaking before them. Vinnie would be abroad with Mike, laughing as they rode stirrup to stirrup. And presently, the last ride made, they would sit through winter evenings by the fireplace happy and contented. That picture, which he could not shut out of his mind, saddened him, made him lonely. Then he would shrug his shoulders angrily, admonishing himself to be a good loser.

"It'll be all the same a hundred years from now," he would say impatiently to himself. But that undoubted truth didn't seem to make it any pleasanter.

So one day succeeded another with little to break the monotony of lying down and sitting still and thinking thoughts that didn't cheer his soul, while he waited for

that wound in his side to heal. And one afternoon Mike Stratton came riding down the creek bank to the Half Moon on a coal black Rolling M horse that bounced and snorted like a buck deer.

He sunk himself into a deep chair near Ches with a cheerful smile.

"We got all the calves weaned an' on feed, an' the ridin's over," said he. "Most of the stuff is rangin' high in the Larb. Good shelter an' fine feed in them hills. We can settle down for the winter. If there was enough women in the blamed country we could stage a dance or two. When you comin' home?"

"I don't know," Ches replied. "I have not much ambition to go anywhere yet."

"You'll be steppin' high, wide an' handsome pretty soon," Mike prophesied. "I got plugged through the shoulder in a fuss on the Cimmaroon about three years ago. For two or three weeks I felt like that—as if I'd never be no good again.'

Mike rolled himself a cigaret.

"I ought to tell you somethin'," he said quite casually. "I had a more personal insight into this mixup than I let on the other day. You remember the night Shorty come back? You an' him sat in your room talkin' quite a spell after supper."

"Yes." Ches wondered what was coming.

"Well, I had occasion to go out the back way," Mike continued. "An' as I walked by your window I caught a word that stopped me. I ain't in the habit of spyin' or listenin' at keyholes. But I had to use my ears that time. I'm not no sneak, Ches. Your window was up a coupla inches. So I listened to what you an' Shorty said. I couldn't help it. I had to. So when I went south of the river I knew what to look for and who."

"Yes, but why did you feel it was up to you to make that kind of a move on Duchain?" Ches asked.

"Because I didn't know if you would," Mike replied. "Duchain had it hung on your brother. I know what family feelin' is. It looked to me, after hearin' what was said that night, as if you might let it slide. You didn't want to. Sure, I know that, but you might think you had to. So I made up my mind then an' there to force your hand. I wanted to get track of them stolen cattle of Vinnie's an' I was bound to get the man that shot Baldy Cooper, whether it was Dick Williams or Frank Duchain, or anybody. It was my job."

"Go on," Ches said. "I don't *sabe* yet, but I'm listening."

A faint amused smile crossed Mike's face.

"Well, you see," he explained, "I come into this country for that an' nothin' else. Baldy Cooper had a son that nobody in Montana ever heard of. That's me."

"You! Baldy Cooper's son?" Ches hoisted himself in amazement, regardless of the twinge in his side. "Then you're Vinnie's brother?"

"Half-brother," Mike corrected. "Baldy was married twice. First wife died right after I was born. My granny raised me."

"FURTHERMORE," Mike continued unperturbed, "Bull MacCormack is my uncle. Right name's George MacCormack Cooper. He's my father's — Baldy's — youngest brother. He told you his wife was Baldy's niece, but that was just a stall. Aunt Mattie looks like a Cooper, a heap like Vinnie, in fact, but she ain't blood-kin. She's an awful spitfire. He didn't know but what she might bawl you out sometime, an' you'd wonder why. So he told you she was Baldy's niece.

"You was pretty well surrounded by Coopers, Ches. Bull come up here to look into that killin' right off. I come as soon as I could. We aimed to get at the bottom of it somehow, before we made our move. But Bull couldn't ever get hold of anythin'. Nor did I, until you come back an' started the fireworks with the Rollin' M."

"Did Duchain suspect who you were, d'you suppose?" Ches wondered. "Reckon that was why he sicked Mose Crane on to you."

"I don't think so," Mike said. "It was you he was cravin' to get. I would bet anythin' it was Duchain shot at you from that dark lot. It was him or his men sent them threats an' burned the buildin's, to make it seem like a Cooper play when you got downed from ambush sometime. I think all them plays was protection plays from Duchain. He was scared. He knew if you worked this range long enough you were smart enough to get on to his operations, an' determined enough to go after him rough shod. I could see that for some reason he was dead leery of you.

"What I heard an' saw of Duchain made me hate the sight of him. I knew he was one of them that found Baldy Cooper dead at the Rollin' M, an' it didn't take me long to suspect he knew more about Baldy Cooper's killin' and his missin' cattle than he'd ever tell. Of course, there was the chance the Half Moon did down the Old Man for reasons of their own. But I couldn't figure why the Williams outfit would murder cold-blooded a man that worked for 'em ten years straight. And you only had to size up Frank Duchain to see that he'd do anythin' from pickin' pockets to murder, if he thought he could get away with it."

"Shields and Mose Crane, when they come up for trial—the Old Man has already laid a murder charge against them—they'll swear to Duchain doin' it," said Ches. "Dick can't swear to anything, because he has no recollection of what took place that mornin' till they woke him up. So they'll probably come clear on that. The only benefit of trying 'em will be to put it all on record. But we got 'em cinched for cattle stealing and for shooting us up. They'll get anywhere from fifteen years to life."

"Take it up one side an' down the other, we made quite a clean-up," Mike grinned.

Ches lay back in his chair. Baldy Cooper's son. It was fitting that he should exact vengeance, and Ches no longer felt that Mike had somehow cheated him in killing Duchain. Queer how the same thing looked from a different angle.

"Mike," he said presently, "my father wants a round-up foreman. I told him you were the man for the job. Now that I know you're Baldy Cooper's son I think it would be what they call poetic justice for you to step into your father's boots on the Half Moon range."

"I expect I could handle it," Mike said calmly. "I was raised at the business. But how about you? You're a cowman. I got a notion the last time I was here that Old Man Williams was mighty proud of you. Don't he want you to stay with him?"

"Yes," Ches admitted. "He does. But I don't want to. I am going to stay with the Rolling M—in the Larb Hills."

Mike grinned again, impishly.

"Well, if he offers me the job of runnin' the Half Moon round-up, he sure won't have to speak above a whisper," he said frankly. "I always had ambitions to run a big outfit. It runs in the Cooper family."

Mike rose and stretched his slim, wiry body.

"Say, I feel good, Ches," he said with a friendly smile. "I feel like a different man. Seems like I got somethin' terrible off my mind. For months I have been ready to fight my own shadow. Now a man would have to be real mean an' persistent at it, to make me mad. I am goin' out to see if that Chink cook has a spare hunk of pie."

He walked to the door, turned on the threshold, came back to stand over Ches.

"Say," he remarked innocently, "Vinnie said to inquire if you recollect askin' her somethin' right after she scalded her hand in Saco last summer. She wants to know do you remember what she said?"

"I remember," Ches murmured.

Yes, he remembered. He wasn't likely, he thought, to forget.

"Well," Mike drawled, "she says to me this mornin', 'Tell Ches I've changed my mind'."

A Story of Submarine Fighters

and

UNDERSEA PREY

By HAROLD BRADLEY SAY

THE ORDERLY saluted the commander of *E-32*.

"Captain Lincoln desires to see you, sir," he chanted.

Lieutenant-Commander Vernon Carrington inhaled a long drag on his cigaret, then neatly flipped the butt over the side of the *Shepherdess*, mother ship to a flotilla of British submarines of the North Sea patrol. He started for the ladderway that led to the executive office.

"See you below presently," called Carrington to a knot of brother officers with whom he had been talking. "Shoot you for the drinks."

The tall, upright figure with a half stern, yet youthful face—Carrington was but twenty-eight—flicked a wave at the group on deck as he dropped nimbly down the stairway.

"Sit down, Carrington," said Captain Dexter Lincoln of the *Shepherdess*. "I want to talk to you."

Carrington slid into a big maroon leather chair.

"You'll be going out tomorrow evening, Carrington," commented the captain.

"Yes, sir," replied Carrington, wondering what the flotilla commander had on his mind.

Captain Lincoln rubbed a hand over a skinny cheek bone, looked across the table at Carrington in a contemplative, hesitating way.

"You'll—er—there will be a Lieutenant Seabrook from Admiralty to go along with you this patrol," he explained.

A little frown crossed Carrington's face. The genial sparkle in his blue eyes faded.

"I realize you boat captains rather resent these visitors," spoke Captain Lincoln evenly, "but it is part of the system. You know—sort of observers to make recommendations on construction, improvements and the like."

The captain hesitated.

"Make it as comfortable and agreeable

as possible for Seabrook," he added. "I'll consider it a favor, and I'm certain it won't do you any harm, Carrington, old fellow. That's all."

"I'll do the best possible," returned Carrington with a tone that intimated the lieutenant from Admiralty would find no brotherly welcome awaiting. "Of course, our accommodations are a bit limited, you know."

Carrington was glowering savagely when he drifted into the noisy wardroom of the *Shepherdess* a few moments later. Officers of the flotilla were engaged in a lively contest with the dice to see who would pay for the cocktails before dinner.

"Here's Carry," shouted a young lieutenant commanding one of the boats. "He's a lucky stiff, but maybe we can clip him for the drinks tonight. I—"

The lieutenant broke off with his jocularity. He saw the scowl in Carrington's face; the smoldering anger in his eyes.

"What's chafing you, Carry, old top?" asked some one.

All eyes were turned on him. The dice ceased to rattle.

Briefly the captain of *E-32* told his troubles.

"So you drew him?" queried the captain of *3-I*. "Heard Admiralty was sending one of its spies to this flotilla. Well, cheer up, he'll likely take a ride with some of the rest of us."

"And you can make life enjoyable for him," put in another with a significant note in his words. "Fine business, this snoop system."

"A jolly time I'll give him," said Carrington significantly. "But inspectors or no inspectors, let's have a drink around. Where are the dice?"

THE FOLLOWING night at ten o'clock found *E-32* well out to sea, sliding along at surface trim. Short, choppy seas slapped against the starboard side of the underwater craft. At intervals sharp gusts of wind picked up the tops of curling lumps of ocean and showered heavy sheets of spray down on the figures on the conning tower bridge.

The crew had settled down to sea routine. Now and then one of their number came up out of the depths of the sub to snatch a bit of fresh air or have a quick smoke. Lieutenant-Commander Carrington and Lieutenant James Hastings, R. N. R., his navigating officer, stood peering out over the choppy ocean toward the dark rim of the horizon. The coxswain occasionally shifted his position and moved the wheel this way then that as he held the boat to her course toward the enemy's water.

Hastings had just come up.

"Well, Hastings," said Carrington quietly, "how's Lieutenant Seabrook making out?"

"Quite all right, sir, I think," returned Hastings. "He said he was turning in early tonight."

"Very decent of you to give him your bunk and take the hammock, Hastings. These boats really should have a spare room—sort of owner's quarters, you know."

There was a sarcastic tone that Hastings caught. He understood his superior's resentment. The navigating officer had been a second mate on a merchant ship when he offered his services to the navy. A man in the merchant service learns to swallow many things.

"The lieutenant doesn't seem to be such a bad sort, sir," spoke Hastings with a placating note in his words. "Strange a man would reach his years and have not gone higher than lieutenant."

"It is that," replied Carrington. "Been pegged for something or other, I'd hazard."

Just at that moment Hastings nudged Carrington. The latter turned and caught sight of a form coming up through the hatch.

"Thought I'd come up and sniff a bit of air before I turned in." Lieutenant Seabrook spoke casually in a rich, vibrant voice.

"Not a bad night," said Carrington, trying to be polite. "A bit choppy but not uncomfortable."

"We officers on shore duty rather envy

you chaps out here with your own commands," continued Lieutenant Seabrook.

"It isn't all a rosy paradise and perpetual holiday," returned Carrington. There was veiled sarcasm in his words.

"I fancy not," replied Seabrook unruffled, and stood looking off across the heaving blackness.

Shortly he bade the boat captain and navigating officer good night and dropped below.

"Well," said Carrington after he was gone, "I hope he gets his eye full. You know, Hastings, since you mentioned it, I've been wondering too, how it comes that a man his age should have his low rank. He looks forty-five or fifty at least."

Which was true. Seabrook's hair was gray about the temples and he had a stiff, trim mustache that matched it. There was something about the wrinkles in his face coupled with a comprehending twinkle in his dark eyes that suggested a benign, fatherly soul under his uniform and naval snap.

The sub forged on through the creaming seas like a great porpoise intent on reaching a specific destination.

"Keep this course until I order a change," Carrington instructed Hastings. "We'll dive at half past four. Call me at quarter past."

"Very well, sir," responded Hastings.

Carrington dropped down into the control room where the thump and clatter of the Diesels drowned out all other sounds. He picked his way forward, stooping carefully under hammocks and stepping gingerly over forms stretched out on deck so as not to disturb the sleep of his men. Good, loyal fellows, his crew, from grizzled old Blakely, the chief engine room artificer, down to the newest lad. And his officers—Hastings and the enthusiastic Sub-Lieutenant Wilkie Smith were the finest in the land.

There is an attachment that grows up between officers and men of a submarine that is found in no other branch of the service. The very nature of the submarine accounts for it. Each man has specific major or minor duties to perform. One single slip by any one of them can convert their boat into a common coffin. Paternally, Carrington's eyes took in the faces of sleeping men he walked under or over.

Lieutenant Seabrook was in Hastings' bunk, apparently dead to the world. Noiselessly Carrington crawled into his own and dropped into a fitful sleep.

The first hint of day in the eastern horizon was discernible when the coxswain called Carrington. Ten minutes later the submarine's commander crawled up to have a look around, then directed the navigating officer and helmsman to take their diving stations. The sailor slapped down the lid of the magnetic compass, unshipped the gyro-repeater and dropped to his post below in the control room to carry on his steering. Carrington went down last. He slammed home the hatch lid and screwed the strong back on to position. He gave orders for flooding the various tanks. The air manifold hissed and water gurgled in the great valves of the underwater boat. *E-32's* nose canted forward and the sub was swallowed by the North Sea. Men worked the hydroplane wheels, and the craft moved along on an even keel at thirty feet. No noisy thumping and clatter of Diesels now; only the musical humming of the big electric motors and the stewing in the air lines.

At intervals during the day, *E-32* came up to have a look around with her periscope, then dropped back to her submerged cruising level. It was about midnight when Carrington and Hastings checked their data. Afterward they settled down on the bottom to await daylight.

Lieutenant Seabrook had wandered about looking at *E-32's* vitals and occasionally asking a question. He was so unobtrusive about it all; his manner so agreeable that Carrington found most of his resentment against the elderly lieutenant vanishing. He found himself chatting with Seabrook over breakfast, which consisted mainly of cocoa and hard

boiled eggs. One doesn't do much cooking, particularly frying, in a submarine.

"We'll go up in fifteen minutes," Carrington instructed Hastings and Sub-Lieutenant Wilkie Smith after breakfast.

He didn't ask if everything were ready; he knew that. However, he went forward to the torpedo room in the bows to have a cursory look about. Everything was just as it should be. No boat had a better crew than *E-32*. Carrington glanced at the brass doors of the tubes glistening under the rays of the electric lights. His eyes rested a moment on the firing mechanism that stood ready to unleash the long cylinders of destruction. The lieutenant-commander passed a word or so with the leading torpedo man and started back to the control room.

"Diving stations!" called Carrington.

Men jumped to their proper stations. The hydroplane men turned their shiny wheels. *E-32* nosed upward.

"Hold her at eighteen feet," snapped Carrington.

"Aye, sir."

The boat leveled off at the designated depth. Quickly Carrington raised the periscope for a look-see.

IT IS always a tense moment when a submarine comes up for a glance at the surface after considerable time spent below. Where the sea may have been an empty waste devoid of any moving thing but minutes previously, may come the spectre of a sharp edged prow hurling out two walls of white with wicked flashes from their center. Or a zooming shadow of an airplane may presage a blinding crash that means a rush of water inside frail steel walls, then oblivion. There are many things that may happen to a submarine when it comes out of the depths for one brief glance.

Quickly and without a word, Carrington raised the periscope. Men carried out their duties or stood at posts apparently as unconcerned as if on practise maneuvers, but there was a certain, indefinable tensity in the boat as the periscope reached up to daylight. Those near the control room knew that the slim cylinder was cutting through the surface and leaving a trail of creaming white behind. What if something went wrong? What if Carrington did the wrong thing? But he wouldn't. If he failed, any one else would have done likewise.

Carrington's eyes swept the immediate vicinity for possible trouble. Nothing. Methodically he surveyed the more distant horizon.

"Hello?" It was more in the nature of a comment to himself than to those about him.

"Something, sir?" queried Hastings quickly.

"Merchantman of some kind off to port!" replied Carrington slowly without taking his eyes from the shape and smoke smudge out on the left.

At this time, certain neutrals were suspected of overlooking some of the finer points of neutrality in their cargoes and destinations. British submarines of the North Sea patrol made their business to give these suspected ones more than a passing glance.

Standing off to one side as absorbed and unobtrusive as a surgeon observing another perform a particularly interesting operation, Lieutenant Seabrook watched Carrington. No emotion, no excitement in his face. His hands were pushed straight down in his jacket pockets. Those who worked around him were hardly conscious that he was there.

"Steer 80," Carrington directed quietly, while he continued to squint at the ship across the heaving waters. "Want to have a look-see at this fellow."

Steering chains rattled and all felt the slight heel of *E-32* as she swung around to head for the merchantman.

"Flood the tubes," ordered Carrington methodically.

Not likely he would be using torpedoes but it paid to be always ready. The command was echoed forward. A quick hissing sound in an airline; a subdued gurgling. Water from the fore trim tanks was shot in around the torpedoes

ready to be unleashed at a second's notice.

"Firing tanks charged, sir," came Sub-Lieutenant Wilkie Smith's voice from forward. "Tubes flooded."

Eyes rested alertly on gages; hands hovered over levers and valves ready for whatever command might come.

Over his shoulder Carrington spoke tersely to Seabrook.

"Want to get in close," he explained. "Might be a fake merchantman trying to bait me in range of guns he has hidden away. Well to be within torpedo range before hailing."

"I see," nodded the gray haired lieutenant with the rich, vibrant voice. "How far—"

Every one in *E-32* heard the terrifying, whirring rumble bear down on them. It filled the inside of the boat like the rising roar of a freight train thundering into a tunnel.

"Hard a dive!" shouted Carrington as he himself leaped for the hydroplane wheels.

The other boat was too close.

Crash!

E-32 twisted sharply to one side. Men rocked on their feet and reached for supports. The concussion of the blow was terrific.

Faces froze in sudden panic. For an instant men stopped living.

The big motors continued to hum. The master gyro kept on its song. The log still clicked. *E-32*, struck by some other submarine—whether friend or foe those within knew not—was still alive. Men breathed again.

All heard a stream of water cascading in through an opened seam.

"Up!" cried Carrington. "Blow the buoyancy—the auxiliary!"

Coxswains spun the plane wheels. Hands twisted valves. Air hissed through the lines as it forced the water out of the tanks. Quickly *E-32* responded. Up, up she climbed.

Pumps lapped at the water pouring in from the split seam. The inflow decreased as the submarine neared the surface and pressure lessened.

"Thirty—twenty - five—fifteen—ten—surface," cried the man at the depth gage.

Abruptly the inrush of water stopped as the rounded sides of *E-32* broke through dripping water and shining brightly in the sunlight.

No sudden relief marked the face of Carrington as they reached the top. A critical moment it is when a submarine unable to dive comes up in water where enemy destroyers, cruisers, Zeppelins, airplanes, submarines or even a friendly but over zealous friendly merchantmen may promptly blow him to pieces.

Hastings, several years Carrington's senior, turned an apprehensive eye toward his commander. Sub-Lieutenant Smith up forward in the tube room controlled the nervousness of a twenty-one year old underwater officer and stood silently waiting the next order.

Lieutenant Seabrook had scarcely shifted his position in one corner of the control room. Calm and silent he stood without an outward indication of any concern within. Yet, had one looked closely he would have observed a certain penetrating intensity in the gray studious eyes that followed every move of Carrington and simultaneously took in all that occurred around him.

The hatch top was open now and daylight streamed down into the depths of the submarine like sunshine coming down a manhole. Carrington started upward with Hastings at his heels. A coxswain with his gear followed.

"Bring your signal flags, Burns," came Carrington's voice down the hatch.

Burns, a wizened old timer of his Majesty's service, hastened to carry out the order.

Off to port steamed what was apparently an honest tramp flying the Danish flag. Through his glasses Carrington could see that the vessel was swinging around to show her stern.

"Taking no chances, that fellow," he concluded grimly. "Getting ready to run. Tell him to stop for boarding."

Burns started wigwagging.

The men who manned the six-pounder forward of the conning tower clambered up the hatch and hastened to their station. Carrington's glasses were fastened on the bridge of the tramp where several figures moved about. The glasses were twelve-power lenses, and he saw the thing happen as though it were but a stone's throw away.

On the poop of the tramp was a house that might have been used for crew quarters, stores or any number of purposes. As if by magic its sides fell down to the deck. Carrington saw the gun crews training their pieces. He saw the wicked stabs of reddish flame belch out from the muzzles.

He dropped his glasses.

They came with a rising shriek—five-inch shells from long range guns. They roared through the air close to *E-32* like ripping bolts of thunder. Two mighty fountains climbed heavenward, both over and about a hundred yards to the starboard side of the British submarine.

"Fire! Cut loose!" shouted Carrington.

Blangety-bang! The six-pounder barked out viciously. Several seconds, then a fountain of white went skyward slightly to the right of the freighter. A quick series of movements around the six-pounder. Again it crashed. Almost simultaneously two more flashes ripped out from the stern of the tramp. Carrington heeded not the shrieking roar that bore down on his command. He strained his eyes to catch a black burst and a hurtling of steel and other things from the hulk of the freighter. Again the six-pounder's fountain shot heavenward, a quarter of a mile short of its target.

"Raise your elevation! Up!" shouted Carrington.

"Maximum now, sir!" shot back a voice from the gun.

"Oh, God!" Carrington's exclamation was a half sob.

Outranged, unable to get a shot into the German with his wicked and high mounted long rangers, it would be but minutes until the enemy would discover that he could not submerge. The German could stand off out of range and hammer *E-32* to bits. It was suicide to dive and certain death awaited *E-32* and her crew on the surface unless the miracle of an allied destroyer showed up. The German was too far away even to justify gambling on the expenditure of a torpedo.

The enemy's guns flashed again. The German ensign was flying from her masthead now instead of the Danish colors.

Again the rising shriek, the awful roar, but no fountains of ocean this time. Two black puffs out in front of *E-32* and above her. A hundred singing, shrieking things filled the air. Metal clanged against the hull of the submarine. Two of the gun crew went down writhing and moaning. Shrapnel!

Again it came. No one fell this time, but just abaft the gun mounting gaped a great, jagged hole in *E-32's* hull. She could not submerge for even a second now. Another shell might hit her lower and send her on her final dive.

Two more projectiles ripped through the air. One burst overhead in a great black puff just before reaching the wounded submarine. The second ripped across her top. Two of the gun crew hurtled over the side into the sea. Another lay sprawled out on the deck with a great hole torn in his chest. The gun itself was tilted forward, finished for all time. Two dazed gunners stood paralyzed beside it feeling themselves over to ascertain whether they still lived.

Carrington had been too occupied to notice that Lieutenant Seabrook had slipped up beside him.

He was conscious of some one brushing past him. He saw some one plunge over the side to the aid of one of the forms struggling in the water. He had a vague remembrance afterward that the water around the man in the water was stained a brownish red.

Seabrook and another of the gun crew struggled to the hatchway to ease the injured one down into the craft where he

would be temporarily protected from things flying through the air and where he would be no worse off when the sub went down.

A stream of blood trickled down Carrington's face. A chunk of shrapnel had torn a nasty gash along one side of his head. Unmindful of it, he shouted orders at his helmsman. The sorely wounded *E-32* swung around in a vain effort to put distance between it and the German. Around came the disguised freighter. Two five-inch bow guns now lashed the hard pressed submarine with wicked bursts of shrapnel.

Carrington looked at the bloody deck with two of his crew lying dead beside the wrecked six-pounder. His nostrils caught the odor of antiseptic floating up from below where Lieutenant Seabrook worked over two men. He looked at the jagged hole along the top. Not a Chinaman's chance. He couldn't dive. His gun was gone. The German could stand off safely out of range and blast him to pieces. Nothing could save him. The next shot might send *E-32* and all her crew to the bottom of the ocean. It was a miracle that the German had not already scored a mortal hit.

Blang! Another burst of shrapnel right over them. The man at the little steering wheel went down with the top of his head gone. A ghost faced Hastings grasped the wheel and shoved the shape at his feet to one side.

Then Carrington decided to do what he'd determined he never would do.

"Quick, Hastings!" he cried with a wild, haunted light in his face that had gone years older in a few short minutes. "Get a white flag—anything will do!"

Hastings dived below, shouting as he went. In ten seconds he shot on deck again.

Carrington grabbed the flag from his hands and wildly waved it. The German could not fail to see it. In a scant half hour Carrington and his crew would be prisoners. Better than to have them all murdered. *E-32* was a shambles now. Four men killed outright, one dying and several badly injured. Another shot could end *E-32's* life.

FERVENTLY he waved the white cloth. The German's answer was another salvo of shrapnel from his fore guns. Hastings went down unconscious with a bad scalp wound.

Sub-Lieutenant Wilkie Smith popped up from below. There was a frenzied light in his youthful face.

"She's taking water, sir," cried he, "faster than we can pump it. Batteries already got a touch of it. Chlorine started."

E-32 was plunging through the seas at her top surface speed. The German leisurely followed, still firing.

"Get every one out before it gets too bad," directed the distraught Carrington.

The muscles of his face worked in a strange way.

From below came sudden clamor. Seconds later the crew clambered up out of the hatchway. Men from the engine room were choking and coughing. Water dripped from their eyes. They poured out like rats from a flooded hole.

From the control room just below came Lieutenant Seabrook's voice, calm and commanding.

"Easy now. Lift him gently. Careful with that leg."

Tenderly as possible and with death likely to strike all of them at any second, men of *E-32* lifted the wounded man back on deck, away from the fumes of the deadly chlorine.

Carrington had handed the white cloth to some one else who waved it frantically. The German steamer ceased firing. Carrington had stopped *E-32*. She lay rolling in the trough of the sea.

The crew of the submarine were huddled about on the narrow deck waiting for the German to come alongside. Seabrook assisted by Blakely, the chief engine room artificer, was binding up best as he could the wounds of Hastings and two others.

E-32 was settling down in the water. The pumps had been left running unat-

tended, but they were not equal to the task. Fumes of chlorine floated up from the bowels of the underwater craft.

Abruptly the German vessel, which had headed in for the submarine, apparently to take aboard the crew, swung outward in an arc that would take her across the bows of *E-32*.

A heavy set figure leaned over the bridge of the craft and shouted through a megaphone.

"How do you like it—English swine?"

Up on a monkey bridge over the chart house, a little knot of Germans wrestled with a canvas covering. Carrington divined what it was even before he saw the Maxim. The German commander climbed up the ladderway to the gun.

"Good God!" cried Carrington. "He won't turn that on us!"

Spellbound, he and his men watched the German adjust the ammunition belt.

An unarmed man will dive under anything for protection when bullets are flying. Perhaps his covering is nothing more than a tent or a piece of paper, but he will take refuge beneath it. Those on the deck of *E-32* looked toward the conning tower hatch. Their nostrils caught the fumes coming out of it. They turned their faces back toward the German gun crew, then to the ocean lapping at the sides of their boat.

"I've surrendered my boat and crew to you," shouted Carrington, "and I demand mercy for my men."

The German looked across at him.

"Is that so?" he mocked. "My dear commander—our prisons are too full. You could not stand it there."

He continued to work with the belt.

Carrington made a wild resolve and made it quickly. Without a word he edged over to the conning tower hatchway and dropped down. The chlorine fumes bit at his throat. He held his breath and hurried. He was unconscious of his own weakness through loss of blood that still dripped steadily down in his face and on to his clothes.

The German was violating all the rules of the war. He planned to murder men who had surrendered, then sink the submarine.

No human sounds down inside the tunnel of *E-32's* hull now—only the mechanical humming of electric motors, the thumping of pumps and the stewing of air in the pipe lines. Carrington's hand reached for the firing mechanism. He knew that the German lay dead in line for his fore torpedo tubes. He couldn't miss. He might sink his own craft on account of the proximity of the German, but what difference?

He shot home the switch. No hissing of air; no jar from a released torpedo. In the shelling, the contact line had been severed.

A sob of helpless anger rose in Carrington's throat. He looked through the little bulkhead door that led forward through the tunnel. Chlorine choked at his throat. His lungs cried for fresh air—anything for daylight and the end of that searing, stabbing thing inside his lungs.

A faint haze shrouded the electric lights that still burned brightly throughout the length of *E-32*. Carrington stumbled through the bulkhead door and struggled forward. A thin tantalizing vapor filled the tunnel ahead. Dizzily, he reeled on. Miles and miles the distance; ages and ages he fought along. Once he stumbled, went down to his knees. Flesh bade him quit the struggle—the fight to reach that room where great copper faces winked wickedly under the rays of the light. On his feet again and staggering forward.

Inside the door now. The copper faces of the tubes laughed and jibed at him. Savagely he plunged forward. The torpedo room reeled. The wicked faces danced everywhere. He tried to reach out—to fasten his hand on the firing mechanism. It seemed to elude him like objectives in a dream. Things were losing their shapes. Objects fused together in dazzling confusion. A subdued clattering sound reached his ear. It seemed to float from miles aft. Faint shouts and cries floated forward with the clattering. The German had opened fire but Carrington

could not so much as remember such a person existed. He had but one objective —one obsession: to move the object in his hand. He gathered himself for a last effort. A sharp hissing of air, a jerk, a rush of water.

Straight home right under the boilers of the German went *E-32's* torpedo.

The German rolled over instantly.

He went under in less than two minutes.

The men of the *E-32* who had not been hit at the first blast of machine gun fire from the German plunged over the submarine's side. The next instant their bodies were shaken by a terrific concussion as water, steam, smoke, and parts of ship went skyward in a hurtling volcanic mass. A spontaneous cheer went up from their throats.

Instead of plunging into the water when the Maxim began its work, Lieutenant Seabrook had dived down into the control room of *E-32* to find where Carrington had gone. The chlorine grew worse with every second. While Seabrook hesitated in the control room, he felt the jar of the released torpedo. Seconds later, he heard the mighty concussion as it bit into the vitals of the German. Correctly he guessed where *E-32's* commander had gone.

"Carrington! Carrington!" he shouted into the chlorine filled tunnel.

There was no answer. He plunged forward through the opening.

Carrington had not heard the roar or felt the concussion of the torpedo he had released. He had not heard the cheer go up from his own men. Neither was he conscious of the arms that closed around him and dragged him aft to the control room. Nor was he aware that his rescuer tumbled down in a heap beside him just as other hands grabbed both of them. He was oblivious to the pistol shooting that occurred when men on the deck of the sinking *E-32* convinced a boatload of frightened Germans that it was best to surrender themselves.

He did not hear the wild shout that went up when a flotilla mate popped up from the depths of the ocean and took aboard the unfortunate but victorious crew and their prisoners. Loss of blood and a heavy dose of chlorine had raised havoc with Lieutenant-Commander Vernon Carrington's thinking processes and nearly taken his life.

IT WAS in a hospital at Harwich that Carrington came back to the land of the living. His lungs seemed to split at every breath and it pained his head to even try to fathom where he was. At last objects around him became things of reality.

The white thing under his chin was a sheet—clean and cool. The white mountain beside him—that was a nurse, a girl with pretty brown hair and soft blue eyes that never left him. He smiled at her faintly.

"Don't talk," said the girl ever so softly.

She raised a finger to her lips in caution.

He rolled his head to one side. On the bed next to him—yes, it was a bed and there was a man in it that held Carrington's gaze. He was still, lying on his back with his eyes fixed ceilingward. His hair was gray around the edges and he had a stiff little moustache that stuck up from his upper lip. His face was old and tired. A heavy set person with glasses sat beside him. He bent over his patient with an instrument pressed against his chest. Another figure came alongside the bed. The heavy set person with glasses on glanced up at the second doctor. There was a look of satisfaction in his face.

"He'll be quite all right presently", commented the large man.

He called the nurse from Carrington's bed and conversed with her briefly, then took his way down the ward with the other doctor at his side.

Carrington fidgeted nervously. He squirmed spasmodically under the covers. The nurse bent over him.

"What is it, sir?" she asked quietly. "What is it you wish?"

"Bloom it, nurse, who's that chap next to me?"

"That person," smiled the nurse, "is Admiral Ripley-Farnham, one of the big persons up at the Admiralty. Know him?"

Carrington shook his head wearily.

"I've seen him some place," he muttered weakly, "but I don't know him."

"Likely you will later," smiled the nurse. "Here, swallow this and go back to sleep for a while."

ARCTIC COMMUNICATION

By Captain Ralph R. Guthrie

THE Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System has the reputation in the Army of being the most romantic activity under the direction of the War Department. This is particularly true as regards enlisted men, particularly those who hold down one man radio stations in the interior. Some of these latter are as completely isolated as it is possible to be in these days of airplanes and radio; others are headsmen of Eskimo villages, postmasters, U. S. deputy marshals, and presidents of village councils.

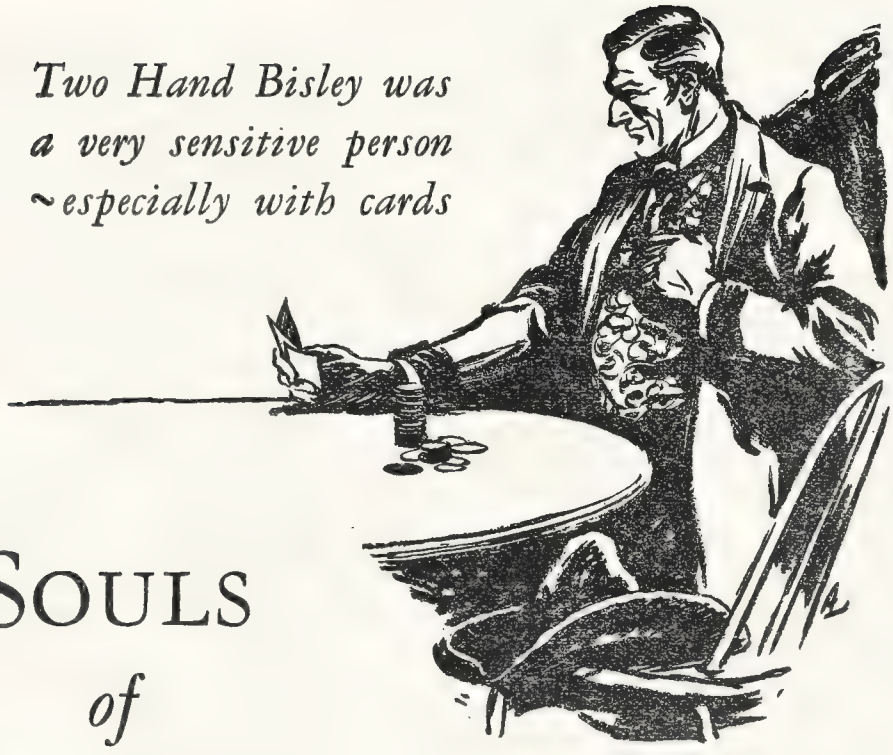
The manner in which the more remote stations are established is in itself as intriguing as any of the over advertised stunts of the Royal Mounted. When it was decided, for instance, to put a radio station on the Chandalar, Private Hanson left Seattle by boat, entered Alaska through Juneau and Whitehorse, down the Yukon river to Beaver, just below the Arctic Circle. His commanding officer at Seward, Alaska, there lost track of him altogether. Crossing the mountains, he pushed his way a hundred and fifty miles due north to the little village of Little Squaw and the gold mine of former Governor Sulzer of New York. There he built his cabin of logs, erected his mast and set up his equipment. Two months later this intrepid soldier was "on the air" and has worked without interruption ever since November 1926.

The U. S. Signal Corps through its W. A. M. C & T. System operates twenty-two stations in the great Alaskan Peninsula. The communication thus afforded the frontiersmen is adequate and the rates cheap. Some of the supplies are furnished by airplane to the more remote stations. One day last winter the soldier at Wiseman sent a message to an aviator carrying mail from Fairbanks and asked that he be "dropped" a case of oranges and two cases of fresh eggs. He believed if the eggs were well packed they would not be broken because the snow was five feet deep and well packed.

But the aviator could not get very close to the ground on account of the wind currents and when he dropped the commodities in one large package they struck the gabled roof of the telegraph office. When he arrived in Nome the following message was received from the grateful operator:

THANKS FOR THE OMELETTE AND ORANGE CRUSH.

Two Hand Bisley was a very sensitive person ~especially with cards



SOULS *of* HONOR

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

SQUINT LEGERE was exceedingly sensitive about the reputation of his three lines of amusement—gambling, dancehall and bar. He wore a black coat, dangling clear around nearly to his knees, usually open in front and displaying a different waistcoat every night for weeks at a time, each one a splendor of embroidered yellow silk, or plain, pale rose, or in winter a deep bronze green—necks of greenhead ducks —or closely shaved beaver.

His trousers were pearl gray, his boots —or shoes, depending on the season—masterpieces in ornate leather. Usually he wore a wide gray, or black, hat always a bit aslant, shading his sharp features and sunken eyes. If he was bareheaded, one saw how flat thick black hair could be plastered down with perfumed oil. His hands were long, narrow, well tanned from frequent rides into the Bad Lands on afternoons, and carefully manicured.

Just one look at him would reveal to most people the sensitiveness of his quivering nostrils and his thin, sensitive lips, the alertness of his eager eyes and those tiny, trivial indications by which one distinguishes a person who is not only high strung and proud, but one who knows it. Legere's smile was quick but thin, though lingering genially at times. He knew exactly how to unbend graciously on occasions when it was important to do so. But in the main he strolled aloof, abstracted and constantly watchful of those minor details of his profession by which he was able to elevate his place to preeminence in Boxelder,

where he occupied the main corner of the Busy Corner of the Court House Square, and kept on friendly yet not exactly intimate terms with the sheriff, prosecuting attorney, county and district judges, and others.

Keeping his place on such a high plane of reputation had given him his austere bearing. Some four years before, Squint Legere had arrived on the stage in Boxelder, unheralded. Immediately on his arrival he crossed to this same corner which he now owned and, running quickly up the diagonal corner main entrance steps, he confronted Blackhead Morisey, who threw up his head like a startled wild horse. Then Morisey, who had in a year there established quite a local repute started to put up his hands.

"Go for it!" Legere ordered coldly. "You can't beg off, Morisey! Go for it!"

Morisey turned pale. His eyes wabbled in their sockets and bulged in abject fear. In Legere's baleful squint he saw only the dire consequences of having been insulting to a high spirited man. After that long half minute of procrastination, with Legere growing more obviously impatient, Morisey started to say something.

"I'll shoot you like a dog if you don't go for it!" Legere cut short the man's effort to delay or placate.

With a frantic terror Morisey at last went for his gun—and went rapidly too. On the instant there was as pretty a shoot out as was ever seen in the Boxelder Square environs. At the inquest Legere turned his head for the coroner's jury to see where Morisey's bullet had nicked the point of Legere's left ear, burning along close enough to draw blood on the side of his head, cutting a streak in his hair. That proved self-defense, and everybody knew how meticulously scrupulous Legere could be in giving the other fellow an even break.

OTHER killings had followed in due course. Squint Legere had not told any one why he killed Morisey. At the same time, when he met the widow in Attorney John Grimes' office there could have been only one explanation of why he treated her with such cold civility. She was very beautiful, with large brown eyes, an olive white face, and the tragic air of having made in her life one fatal mistake for which she now completed payment by turning over to Squint Legere the property of Blackhead Morisey which was all in her name.

Legere paid her an unannounced sum of cash, and at intervals sent her a certified check which was returned from Down East somewhere, so that in due course he had bought, at a bargain, a valuable income property. And when Attorney Grimes drank too much one day and Legere smiled at his antics, the lawyer in high dignity said—

"'F I had done to any lady what you did to Morisey's widow I'd never smile again long's I live!"

With the utmost difficulty Legere restrained himself from killing Grimes on the spot. Squint admitted himself that only the intoxication and irresponsibility of the fellow saved his life even temporarily. Sober, though, he must make amends for what he had said when drunk. Nothing could be quite so painful to sensitive honor as a remark about one's treatment of a lady. Grimes, sober, almost proved he was right in the matter, for he borrowed a rifle and went hunting for Legere; and when they met, Grimes missed his shot because of a faster one in his neck. Thus the Widow Morisey, now a boarding house keeper, lost a champion.

A FEW months later a cowboy playing in the Legere green room saw something, no one ever told what, in the manipulation of cards by Two Handed Bisley, one of the best dealers.

"Hey, you tin horn cheat!" the cowboy shouted angrily, and of course the gambler shot him dead then and there.

Legere hired the two best criminal attorneys in the state to defend Two Handed Bisley who had with his instantaneous accuracy upheld the sacred reputation of the games of chance on Legere's premises. Legere didn't wait for the

inquest, even. Bisley had Purkey and Marshaw, who always defended Legere, standing right there from the start, and the matter never went any further than having the grand jury take up the matter and then put it down again. It wasn't right to call a Legere gambler a cheat, and Bisley was excused for being hot tempered under such an accusation.

Three other patrons of Legere's games were killed in due course, all on account of their saying things likely to hurt the reputation of his place. He was most sensitive about it. On each occasion Purkey and Marshaw were present at the legal proceedings, regardless of expense. For of course if a gambler couldn't protect himself from imputations against his honesty, what would be the use of trying to build up a reputation by accurate shooting under even the impulsive insults of patrons who thought they saw something? Every one knew, now, that Squint Legere was the soul of honor.

One day a cowboy came wandering into Legere's hotel and dropped his ornate saddle, worth a good $350, to judge by the stampings and Hamley workmanship, fisted his name, Crinkley Bob Heathers, on the register and bought a handful of cigars, paying from an enormous roll of currency. Then he went and took a drink of liquor—good stuff!—which he sipped appreciatively, as if he wanted the flavor to last. He presently ate supper and went to dance with a girl, Prairie Blossom, to whom he took a strong fancy. He claimed her every set, and Squint Legere had some trouble getting word to her that her friend had a wad of money, too much for liquor and dancing to get into very deep. So Prairie urged Crinkley Bob to stake her to a turn at roulette, but he shook his head. He'd rather give her five dollars than see a woman trying to gamble, he said.

"Gambling's a man's play," he said. "Women don't know how to bet."

"Prob'ly you think you can gamble yourself!" she jeered.

"Not so good!" he admitted. "Not so good!"

So for three days Crinkley Bob just played around, and everybody knew presently that he had a wad so big he couldn't carry it all in one roll, and he didn't drink enough or grow careless enough for anybody to get reasonable strippings off of it. Legere set relays of workers upon the visitor. One learned that Crinkley Bob had a dark secret in his past. That looked like a bank or train robbery, of course. Come to think of it, he did have a kind of swagger devil may care look to him. He had long, slim hands. He wore shooting arms inconspicuously—but where they were handy.

He lacked one characteristic, only, of a holdup man. He didn't throw his money all over the place. He was liberal, but not careless. And he was good company for the girls; they all liked him, and he treated them like ladies. He fed them in the restaurant, took them to the drug store to eat ice cream, and he danced wonderfully well. But he wouldn't spend his money in a year, at that rate!

COURT Week came. That meant circuit riding attorneys, lots of jurors, and a bunch of litigants, witnesses and other people. With the rest came Purkey and Marshaw, the famous legal firm, with some stenographers, clerks and a retainer—another murder case. Naturally, they put up at Squint Legere's, as did the circuit judge and all the big ranchers, lawyers and others involved. Squint, in the duties of host befalling him, lost track of Crinkley Bob Heathers.

The next he knew Two Handed Bisley sent word to him.

"I need more money!"

That was curious. Squint Legere's dealers weren't supposed ever to want more than their case full. Legere, however, sent over some cash and followed to look into the matter. Prairie Blossom had at last succeeded in persuading Crinkley Bob Heathers to play poker. And now Bob had been cleaning up everybody. He had about $3500 and was still going strong. In fact, the only players

who were holding up against Crinkley Bob were the two lawyers, Purkey and Marshaw. They were two hundred or so ahead of the game which was sinking Two Handed Bisley. They were having the time of their lives. They had gone under for fifty or so, two or three times, and then they had picked up ahead again.

Bisley was nervous. Sitting in was Bar Diamond Murdock, the leading rancher in the county, a little under the weather with drink, his pockets full of money and anxious to play. If it hadn't been for Crinkley Bob the house would have stood in on perhaps $7500 or so—easy! But that blamed cowboy was throwing dust all over the place, every time he tossed his horns.

Murdock was going well, though, getting his money on to the table. He was a gaunt, weather beaten, hard headed fellow, not so very old but a mighty good business man as regards cows. Once in awhile he would burst out for a few days, on a spree, and then the money flew. It was all ready to fly now. And yet Bisley hadn't been able to connect with the cow funds. That fact was bothering him, as Legere could see.

Bisley kept going badly. Crinkley Bob had more than a thousand dollars of the fresh supply of money, and the two lawyers had increased their stacks of chips and cash by another fifty each. To do that in this kind of playing tickled them immensely. Legere was mighty glad, too, to see them in such a good mood. It showed that Bisley hadn't entirely lost his sense of strategy, even though that cowboy had somehow run into one of those strange and inexplicable streaks of card perversity with which all habitual students of backs and faces are familiar.

Bisley dealt all around, the cards falling like fluttering leaves, five in the air at a time, and he snatched his hand to study their faces carefully as they came from the table. The others took their hands, except Murdock. He sat staring at the backs of his cards and, as his turn came, he looked up rather quickly when he was reminded of the need of his attention. He pulled his hand from the table, looked perfunctorily at the cards and rather contemptuously dropped them back on the table. He was through. Two Handed Bisley stirred ever so little, his lips curling in and out as never before. Something had gone wrong.

"Reckon I'm through," Bar Diamond Murdock remarked when the play was ended with Bisley drawing in about eleven dollars.

He swung back out of his chair and cashed about three hundred dollars' worth of chips, leaving the place without even a drink. Squint Legere slid into the vacated chair and went on with the playing. His coming in was followed by a stinger. On Purkey's deal Crinkley Bob delicately challenged Marshaw, who dropped out, and Legere horned in rather eagerly. Murdock's sudden and inexplicable departure was rankling. In a place of such high sensitiveness as regards honor, to lose the rancher with practically all his cow money intact might mean anything. Legere didn't want the matter remembered. Accordingly, he tried to start something—and Crinkley Bob pulled down $4300. Yet neither Bisley nor Legere could tell for certain whether it was a bluff or a real hand.

AN HOUR later, after cautious playing, there was a jackpot. It grew till the cowboy dealt and he had to double all his stacks in consequence. Cold, implacable, watchful, Legere and Bisley fixed their attention on the stranger. They knew, they thought, what could be done with cards. But a time came when Squint Legere's mouth was dry and sweat was gathering in his palms. Science itself had failed. Bisley would have quit, but the proprietor knew no one was so good as Two Hand, nervous or not, in that emergency. It was Crinkley Bob's deal, and he pulled the cards together with a raking sweep.

Watching the pasteboards—new decks had been broken out repeatedly—Two Handed Bisley obviously stared at the cowboy's fluttering, flying, interweaving

fingers. Crinkley Bob seemed to have a cowboy's fondness for expansive motions. He turned his head, lifting his hands, dropped the deck for Marshaw to cut and picked the cards up again.

"Why, you damned cheat!" Bisley squawked like a cat, reaching for his gun.

Bisley's bullet went down through the top of the table into the floor under Crinkley Bob's chair. The cowboy's .45 caliber slug went through Bisley's heart, lodging in the backbone. And with such a circling sweep of two guns as none present had ever seen before, Crinkley Bob swung around with his back to the wall beside the card cabinet.

"Do you call me a cheat, too, Legere?" Crinkley Bob demanded.

Legere's lower jaw shook, his teeth chattering. His hands were up. His eyes, starting from their sockets, bulged for once almost out of those deep holes. The bystanders gazed with expressionless faces, except those behind Legere, who spread swiftly, all clear to the nearest side. Men who had accused Bisley and others in that place of cheating had been instantly killed by the men accused. Legere had been exceedingly careful that no bare faced whiner, like that, escaped. Even looks had been challenged angrily. He too thought he had seen something, but Bisley had spoken the quicker, Crinkley Bob out catting them both.

"Speak up, you!" Crinkley Bob demanded. "Do you say now I cheated? If you wanta lie, say it—or keep your mouth shut forever!"

Now, if ever, Squint Legere could prove his nerve. He could make the same charge as Bisley; he had been watching that cut, too. Accordingly, Squint Legere went back on the gunplay of his dealer.

"I didn't see anything," he said in a hollow voice.

"All right then!" Crinkley Bob said. "And you, gentlemen?"

"Why, not a thing!" The two attorneys shook their heads.

"Legere—get the cash for those checks, please," the cowboy ordered, and Legere went to drain the tills and safe and cases beyond the last dollar. He had to borrow $180 from two of the girls to make good, and then more for the attorneys, who were proud of their part in that game.

CRINKLEY BOB HEATHERS moved with his bagful of cash over to the Widow Morisey's boarding house out on Buffalo Bush Road. He stayed at the boarding house while Purkey and Marshaw saw him safely through the labyrinth of the coroner's inquest and the grand jury. In favor of Two Handed Bisley a precedent was there on the records, how sensitive he had been as regards his honor, under charge of cheating.

"Purely as a matter of form," Attorney Purkey said, "we'd like to have Mr. Legere testify in this inquest."

Legere hesitated, but finally took the stand and in a low voice said he had seen nothing wrong in Crinkley Bob's card manipulation. He admitted that if he had, of course, he would not have hesitated to challenge him, throwing him out bodily if possible.

"Then you are of the opinion that Bisley made a mistake?" Purkey insisted.

"Why—uh—a fatal mistake!" Legere twisted unhappily.

When Squint Legere left the stand the defense summoned Bar Diamond Murdock from an inconspicuous place in the audience. He came willingly. He gave Legere only the most casual glance. He told his name, occupation and residence. He remembered—perfectly—playing a game, a gentleman's game, as he supposed, in Squint Legere's establishment on the October night in question. But, no, he had not stayed for the shooting.

"Why did you leave?" Purkey inquired.

"I saw Two Handed Bisley ring in a cold deck on us. He went over to the card cabinet after a clean stack. He lifted one from in front and one from in back. I thought that was curious. I wondered what his game was and watched. Reckon he was nervous. Anyhow, I saw both

decks in his hands at once, shifting packs after I'd cut. I didn't say anything, for he was a shooting scoundrel. I pulled out, of course."

"You saw this victim, Two Handed Bisley himself, cheat?" Purkey asked, as if the thing were incredible.

"I did, yes, sir. I was plumb disgusted," the rancher replied.

The lawyers and everybody shook their heads. That was awful. Then on second thought they nodded. The son of a gun had got his, anyhow. The rancher's testimony clinched the matter. Two Handed Bisley had been a tinhorn for all his sensitiveness regarding his dealing.

ACCORDINGLY, the impulsive killing of Bisley by Crinkley Bob went into the limbo of justifiable homicides, unavoidable, self-defense and natural. Squint Legere shrank, huddling in his chair, staring at the floor. Financially he was broke, which wasn't without precedent. For years he had been high strung, spirited, unflinching in his honor's defense. Nobody said anything about it now. Didn't have to. Every one knew.

He had forced Morisey to shoot it out. He had destroyed the attorney, Grimes. His dealers had no triggers on their guns, so ready were they to defend their reputations from possible accusation. But when his time, like that of Morisey, had come, he had preferred to lie and live rather than die for telling the truth about a slicker gambler than he and his.

On his way again, Squint Legere circled the square to take the stage. He met Mrs. Morisey, buxom now and handsomer than ever, on Crinkley Bob's elbow. They were strolling around to the parson's to get married. Bob wasn't in cowboy clothes. He was wearing a long black coat, pearl gray trousers, a beautiful nutria sombrero and a white satin waistcoat with a V-shaped flock of red and black birds embroidered across its ornate front.

On the instant Legere's hand covered his chin. It was unshaven. The other hand brushed his elbow; he remembered some dust there. He felt seedy. He was ashamed. His pride was just about all gone; he knew the feeling of misery. Mrs. Morisey flashed a twinkling smile at him. Crinkley Bob held his head up, his shoulders back, his stride just so.

Everybody around could see, plain as day, that Mrs. Morisey was taking a proud and haughty man to the altar—the soul of honor, too.

Continuing

GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND'S

stirring novel of a condemned windjammer in the most perilous waters known to sailors

THE ROARING HORN

JASON MELLISH, cadaverous old owner of the dingy and ill found windjammer *China Girl* paid Captain Bohannon a cool twenty thousand dollars to take the hulk of a vessel, laden with railroad iron, to Cape Horn and sink her—for insurance. Bohannon planned to set himself ashore at Bahia; and the shanghaied crew, not knowing they had been enslaved for barratry, were destined for destruction in the world's most perilous seas.

But Captain Bohannon, an evil bird of prey, hating Jason Mellish as he hated Mellish's nephew, brilliant young Master Roderick Tyson, abducted Tyson as a hand before the mast. And Jason Mellish did not know, that morning when the *China Girl* left her Staten Island pier, that in the hold was the very nephew for whose profit the murderous voyage was planned.

No one save those of the riffraff crew knew what cruel events befell upon that ominous cruise. And none but Leadspitter, the brutal first mate, knew that Captain Bohannon had found a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars in the suitcase of a dying old man whom they picked up at sea from a burning yacht, and that the old man's daughter, Isora Raineaux, was due for a toss over the rail. Tyson suspected it—and kept his eye aft.

On trivial chances—a foot, an inch, to right or left—hang destinies of human lives. Rotten gear aloft—a stormy night—old Bohannon scheming on deck—and suddenly the mizzen topsail tie carried away, and in a thunderous crash the litter from aloft fell upon him and stove in his head. For days he lay in his cabin, unconscious. With this disaster to Bohannon had fallen all chances of the ship's putting in at Bahia Blanca.

Leadspitter took charge. In the forecastle the crew grew bitter.

"If ye're askin' me, b'ys," old Landberry asserted, "askin' me when we'll get aroun' de Harn, I'll say it'll be on Tibb's Eve—which is niver de divil iver. We'm boun' to be muckered bad . . ."

CHAPTER X

WAR

SHELTERED on the lee side of the house, huddled away from the heavy drive of brine drops that now or then slashed through the night, two figures more ominous than any others aboard were at this moment talking in low and broken words.

Darkness enfolded them, darkness so solid that not even the lookout on the

forecastle head, hanging to the forestay as the *China Girl* caracoled under the wind's weight, could be seen against the inky sky. Overhead, across the deck-house, whistled patters of spray. A snoring wind set halyards humming, blocks acreak, booms ratching. The old skysail yarder shuddered as she bored her way through white spuming turmoils, ever on, on toward what the Horn might hold in store. Crouched under some semblance of cover, there those two figures clung; and blacker even than the night were the devisings of their black hearts.

"T' hell wit' dis ship an' dis trip, too!" one was growling. The gangster, he; the Dodger, who had saved himself from the hot chair only by having dodged aboard the ship, eventually to find that he feared the sea more than the chair itself. "If I'd been wise to what was comin' to me, damn' 'f I'd ha' took dis chance. Ain't dere no way, kid, we can bust up dis here

proposition an' get back to de land, somewheres?"

"Gor blimey, I wish there was!" answered the other, the wharf rat Cockney. "The w'y we're leakin' an' all—"

"Dey can't feed us dis stuff an' get away wit' it!" the Dodger snarled. "I don't know nuttin' about how to start a mutiny, but I wisht to God I did. I'd start one in a minute, an' clean out dem rotten skunks in de cabin, if I thought we could get away wit' it!"

"Syme 'ere," the Cockney agreed, getting a hand hold as the ship lay down to a sliding sea hill. His words blent with a simmering hiss of foam in the night. "If we 'ad the bloomin' guts an' could get enough o' these 'ere blighters to stand with us, we might start a fair mutiny at that!"

"I get you cold, kid. Dat'd be de goods, all right! Rats on all dis woik an' rotten grub—an' maybe get drownded, too! We ain't got a cockroach's chanst, dat's what we ain't. If we c'd get a-hold o' de ship, we c'd get to land somewheres, scatter out, an' some of us make our getaway. I'd take *my* chanst on it. *I'd* take a flash at a mutiny, by God! Make a damn' good job of it!"

A crested roller broke aboard with a roaring thump and turmoil. As it hissed and soughed away through the scuppers the Cockney answered:

"Me, too. Dogs wouldn't live so. Blimey, no! H'anythink is better 'n this —an' drowdnin'. 'Nother thing—"

"What?"

"That gal, there—'er an' the suitcase—"

"Whatcha mean? Kale?"

"That's wot! An' a power of it, too! Brass, enough an' beyond. We'd show *'er*. Just fancy mykin' 'er a h'officer—lettin' a skirt chivy us round! Eyn't that a bloody h'outryge? But it's the brass I'm thinkin' of, most. I bet a tanner to a quid she's got a bloomin' fortune aboard, 'ere!"

With a suck and sluice of waters mightily upborne, the *China Girl* heeled to leeward. The Cockney dully blasphemed, in the peculiarly limited and unimaginative way of his kind, as cold brine swirled about his ankles.

"Only for them skipper lickin' sons o' ones as'd blow the gaff if we tried to start h'anythink," he added, "we could tyke the ship, the skirt an' the brass, too. If this 'ere was a Britisher, 'twould be too chancy. British law, that's h'awful. They'd 'ave us kickin' in a rope's end, for mutiny. But H'american law—a joke, easy to beat. Wot s'y? Gyme fer it, are you?"

For a moment the gangster made no answer. Evil and tortuous thoughts were crowding his brain. From aft of the deckhouse came a dull *thump-thump* as the negro, sheltering himself there, knocked his heels against the house to warm them. Vague and crooning words of an old spiritual he was humming to himself, faintly reached the conspirators:

> "Somebody buried in de graveyard,
> Somebody buried in de sea!
> Git up in de mawnin' before daylight,
> An' sing de jubilee!"

ALL AT once, as the Dodger savaged and pulled at murderous plans, the Cockney shot a question:

"They got the brass in the ship's syfe, likely. Locked h'up. You know 'ow to work syfes, an' that?"

"Safes? Chee, *do* I? Safes is my middle name, kid, see? Show me de keister I can't crack wit' a can opener!"

"Righto! We might get more 'n 'arf the crew to stand with us. Even arfter they all got their split, it'd be somethink 'andsome," cannily judged the gutter-snipe. "Well—"

With a jerk and heave the old ship sent creamy rushes of foam spinning aft. Giddily she lurched, going large before wind and sea. All at once eight bells struck from the wheelhouse, in four metallic clangors of two bells each. These were gustily echoed from forward.

"Midnight," grumbled the Cockney. "Watches chyngin'. We got to go on watch now—got to sty up fer the next four bleedin' hours—a 'ell of a life!"

"Yeh, hell of a life is right. But hold on a minute. You got a gat, ain't you?"

"Yus. An' plenty h'ammunition, too. Blinkin' fool of a Leadspitter, 'e never found 'em, down in the bottom o' my ditty bag. 'Ow about you?"

"Sure I got a gat!" the Dodger affirmed. "T'ink I'd travel wit'out one? Cart-'idges, lots of 'em. Dem mates never frisked me. Dat makes two good old rods we got, anyhow. An' might be one or two more, if we c'd get some o' de guys wit' noive to stand back of us!"

"Couple or three more 'd be all we need," judged the Cockney. "With wot knives there is. Sheath knives, an' some butcher knives an' cleavers an' things from the galley, an' that. Them an' a few clubs. They'd do the job!"

"Sure! Now de cap'n's knocked cock-eyed, who'd stop us? Dere's just Lead-spitter an' dat mick of a Peter Mayes. De skoit, she don't count fer nuttin'."

"No fear! But don't ferget they got a rifle an' some guns too."

"T' hell wid dat! Take a time when de skoit's on watch, bote de men down in de cabin, sleepin', mebbe—cinch!"

"Yus," the Cockney agreed. "But—"

"But what? You ain't gettin' cold feet?"

"No. But if both them h'officers was shot an' chucked h'overboard, 'oo'd navi-gate this 'ere blinkin' old chump of a ship?"

"Who? Why, dat damn' parson, o' course. Tyson!"

"Him? *'E* wouldn't tyke no 'and in it, navigatin' fer us!"

"He would, wit' a gat to his bean! He'd do it, or we'd bang him, we'd stop his clock, you bet! He'd lay a course or somethin', whatever dey calls it."

The gangster's voice ran cold and acid. He spoke with the self-assured ignorance of a lubber who knew less even than the most stupid sailor.

"All we need 's de course. Workin' de ship, dat'd be a lead pipe. We could get to Africa or some place, an' scatter out. No, sir, nuttin' to it, bo, once we get de ship an' de aft gang 's feedin' fishes. An'—"

"Pssst! Chuck talkin'!" cautioned the guttersnipe as steps sounded along the deck toward them in the gloom.

Forward silently slipped the conspira-tors and round the deckhouse, hidden from him who was coming to call the watch.

AS THE forecastle door slid open vague wraiths of light loomed out across the drenched deck, out into the stygian cavern beneath the forecastle head, faintly adumbrating there the massy bulk of the windlass.

"Turn out!" sounded a voice, hoarsely imperative, wind gusted and raw. "Hey there, all starbolines ahoy, d'ye hear the news? Turn out! Shake a leg!"

Grumbles, growls of "All right, all right!" made answer.

Yawning, stretching, complaining, but biddable enough, out into the spray swept night they stumbled. As they came, the men of the watch buttoned such pea jackets or oilskins as they had. Tyson, among them, hauled his cap low and stamped his feet firmly into his three-quarter boots. As it was his trick at the wheel, during the last two hours of the watch, he glanced aloft, sensed wind and wave, judged the sting of chill spray on his cheek. Sky and ocean and all had messsages for him. Heave and jerk of the ship as she bored through the surges, rearing like an old warhorse that still remembers mettlesome days; weight of the wind and feather white churning of breaking seethe that scurried abroil nigh to the scuppers, bore news to him. The surging crests and smooth sea hollows, the foaming, up flung sheaves were friends he knew and loved.

Not so were they to most of the others in his watch. More than one oath they hurled at night and sea as they made way aft along the pitching wetness of the decks. The Cockney and his gunman pal quietly, unobtrusively joined them. So the gang wearily lagged aft, with squashy, slithering boots. And at the break of the poop they raggedly lined up.

Now from the cabin mounted Isora,

free of step, competent, alert. In the noisy dark she made a dim figure, just barely visible by the gleam up through the cabin skylight, a trim figure with one of Peter Mayes' sou'westers tied beneath her chin; a figure girt in some of Mayes' yellow oilskins, whereon the shot spray pattered.

Leadspitter, huge bulked in the darkness, waited for the customary report.

"Watch is aft, sir!"

"Relieve the wheel and lookout," he made answer.

"All right, sir," from Isora. "What's the weather been like? Wind steady? Any signs of change?"

"Looks like it might be gatherin' some, there to wind'ard, sir," Leadspitter replied.

"Sir" she was to him. He saw no disparity in that. Her capacity as second mate entitled her to rank as sir. Sex mattered nothing.

"Mebbe wind in them clouds, or mebbe only rain. Anyways, it'd be a good idea to have the men stand by the r'yal halyards an' light sails. You got to watch kind o' careful tonight."

"Very well, sir."

"An' if you think she can't carry the t'gall'us'ls, better call me afore you start the halyards."

"All right, sir!"

Leaving the ship now in Isora's charge, Leadspitter went below for a "root o' rum", for indulgence in his favorite occupation of reviewing his situation and his joyful plans of murder and loot, and finally for a kink of sleep.

TYSON'S trick at the wheel was, as we know, for the last two hours of the watch, relieving Jubal Tabry the wry leg Newfoundlander. When he took the helm, he could by the skylight glimmer see Isora at the weather quarter, conning the ship.

Like the sea captain's daughter she was, and the good sailor in her own right, inured to all the moods and tenses of old ocean, she poised herself with splendid and supple balance against the heavy bucking roll of the *China Girl*. She spoke no word to Tyson, seemed to recognize his existence by not so much as a look, only remained there to windward, apparently peering far off across the swift, pale curling rushes of the seas that capped and broke in floors of hissing whiteness.

Oddly stirred by that silent and aloof figure, half scornfully resentful of her assumption of superiority, Tyson none the less felt sympathy twinging at his heart strings. He sensed perhaps a little of her supreme loneliness in that strange place and among men who could not understand her; he knew intuitively that as she studied those blind wastes, her long and sad thoughts were with her father, now forever disappeared in its "unsounded deeps and viewless vastnesses". Something of the august, the austere solitude of the sea permeated and ennobled her in his thought. Vaguely he yearned to her, because he knew she needed human sympathy; and, too, because she was the only creature in all that dark immensity with whom by any possibility he could find comradeship.

Thus they two stood there, only a few yards physically sundered, yet as it seemed with infinite spaces setting them apart, and with the ageless ocean for the background of their thoughts. Tyson's eye sometimes rested on the binnacle, dim glowing, again glanced at the half indistinguishable figure of the girl, silent, courageous, on whose shoulders now rested, as on his own, hard responsibilities for the safety of the ship and all aboard her.

As he gripped the spokes in calloused and competent hands, he joyed in the thrust, the quivering pull of the wheel, the feeling of life, of struggle in it, conflict of battling forces. A sense of fortitudinous power thrilled him as he caught the feel and kick of the ancient ship.

Roll and counter-roll, shuddering vibration as betimes the old *China Girl* put her head in deep, then surged shouldering up and shook off tons of brine, set his soul singing. As the ship was, on a wind, she

took about all he had to give. But holding her to her work, he gloried in it as all good sailormen do. His stout heart leaped to the give and take of wind and sea, of hull and towering, pyramided canvas reaching toward the clouds that blackly scudded, all struggling together in that spectral vacancy, with glad, unfettered contest.

Voices of night and ocean spoke to him, as never to a landsman. And those same voices, too, were speaking to the girl. Though what those voices said to each, or whether their austere message was at all the same to them, who could have told?

TYSON steadily kept the *China Girl* head reaching, just about laying her course— "by the wind" as the saying is. Breeze freshened intermittently and sea built gradually higher. Isora steadfastly held the deck. Twice she came into the wheel house to look at the compass, but passed no word. The gleam from the binnacle cast up a ghostly light on her face, giving it an unnatural pallor in which the dark profundities of her eyes made black pools flecked with tiny specks of fire. Her lips, he saw, were full, red as wounds; her black hair, wind blown, tendrilled about her cheek.

"I could hate this woman!" thought the man; and yet he longed to speak to her.

But, even had sea etiquette and law not prohibited him, an underling, from first addressing an officer, he would have bitten out his tongue before he would have spoken first to her.

"Surely," he pondered, "I could hate this woman bitterly!"

So the time fagged on till seven bells of the middle watch. In half an hour Tyson would be relieved.

Just a little before the beginning of the morning watch, Peter Mayes came up to take charge. He spoke briefly to the girl, there in the blustery dark—the usual routine of wind and weather, shop-talk of the sea. Then silence fell between them as they stood together near the forward mizzen shrouds.

So far, well and good. But suddenly—perhaps the Irishman had been nipping a bit of rum—he plumped out:

"Sure, what a girl you are! There's few, by the jumpin' Jupiter, like you!"

She made him no answer to this, but stood looking off into the mystery of sea and night, for all her competence and courage, a lonely, wistful figure.

"Few," the mate continued, "as could take charge of a fourteen hundred ton square rigger. Few as smart as you, miss. Smart as paint, that's what you are!"

The man's short, bow legged figure seemed infused with a certain swaggering boldness, not at all like his usual deference. Yes, of a surety, Peter must have been looking upon the rum when it was red.

"It all depends on how one's been brought up," Isora answered. At the wheel, Tyson could catch her words, could see, though only in dim outline, the girl's self clad in yellow oilskins. "The sea, that's been my life. Years of my life, anyway."

"Ah, but some girls could be years at sea, an' niver get the haul of it. A fine, upstandin' girl! What a mate!"

No reply to this. The Irishman moved a trifle closer.

"A mate, I'm meanin', for any sailorman as had the luck to win ye!"

"That's the last thing in the world I'm thinking of," she returned with a short laugh. "After what I've been through, and considering what's still ahead of us—"

"I know, miss, but what's done is done. What's ahead will be over an' past some day. An' *then* ye'll be thinkin', mebbe? Then—"

"Come to your bearings, Mr. Mayes! Don't be foolish!"

"Foolish is what I am, miss, over you. Foolish as a she capelin, an' I don't care tuppence if ye know it. That's the God's livin' truth. Sure, I can't say fairer than that!"

Her silence was retortive. She moved away to the rail, stood there with hands upon it, dim seen in the night. Tyson, his ears on the stretch and with a slow

moldering fire of displeasure in his heart, took heed of all.

"He's been hitting the booze, that damn' fool has!" thought he.

Unabashed, Peter Mayes followed her. He laid his hand on hers as it rested on the spray wet rail.

"God's livin' truth," he repeated. "An' what's more—"

She made a little dry sound of displeasure, turned away and was about to move forward, when he caught her round the shoulders.

"Sure, ye wouldn't deny a lonely man the comfort of tellin' ye a thing or two?"

She twisted away from him.

"What do you mean?" Her voice cut. "Putting your hands on me!"

"Sure, it's my ileskins ye got on, ain't it? And ain't a man got the right to put his hands on his own?"

At this moment eight bells clanged. The watch came aft, reported, and the relief was put through in due form. Mayes was now officially in charge of the ship; but none the less he persisted in his would be amorous dalliance.

"You're in charge now, Mr. Mayes!" she tartly checked him. "I'm going below."

"Them ileskins is mine," he continued, slightly thick of tongue. "An' if what's inside 'em was mine, too, I'd be the happy man!"

"Good night, sir!"

"But you ain't goin' below, sure, till you've paid toll. Not by the jumpin' Jupiter, you ain't!"

The Irishman's mood had changed, grown ugly and braggart. Tyson felt the fires within him blazing up hotly. He waited with impatience for his relief, now due. Presently Stackhouse came aft to relieve him.

"Full and by; keep her a good full," said Tyson, giving over the wheel.

"Full an' by; an' keep her a good full!" Stackhouse mechanically repeated.

Mayes meantime stood barring Isora's way, as she turned toward the cabin companion. With a swagger of coxcombery he repeated—

"Pay toll, that's what!"

"If you'd leave the rum alone, Mr. Mayes," she threw at him, "you'd have more sense!"

"Squaze a sculpin an' ye're bound to find its thorns. Squaze a pretty girl, an' ye're bound to find she likes it, whativer she says to the contrary. Rum or no rum, machree, ye're the mate I'm wantin'!"

FREED from the wheel, Tyson stepped out of the house and purposefully advanced on Peter Mayes. The mate found himself all at once confronting a grim figure six feet tall and more; found himself hearing:

"Mayes, you've had all the leeway you're going to get. Now you're going to apologize and make a proper good job of it, too!"

A moment, the Irishman stared at Tyson in the gloom. Then he began to bubble oaths, as a lobster bubbles froth.

"You fiddleback louse!" he raucously flung. "I'll make you smell hell for this. Sure, that's what I will!"

Tyson's heart was fire and ice within him as he snatched Mayes by the shoulder and jerked him round toward the girl.

"Come on, now!" he commanded, his voice taut. "Speak your little piece. And be quick about it!"

Mayes wrenched free. Fulminating blasphemies, he struck. The blow, hard fisted and backed by rage, caught Tyson on the right breast, drove him back. He leaped in, though, and like a taut spring released, gave Mayes right and left under the jaw, fair lifted him, flung him wide sprawling along the gangway.

The Irishman writhed, moaned, tried to struggle up; but suddenly collapsed and lay inert, knocked completely cold.

Tyson swung toward the girl, with just two words—

"*That's* paid!"

"Bad business," answered Isora shortly. "You've struck an officer. Stunned him. You'll probably be put in irons for this."

"That's quite all right. It's paid, anyhow."

"Go below and get Mr. Furlong!"

He stepped over the distorted, unconscious figure, went down the companion and knocked at Leadspitter's door. No answer coming, he banged open the door, entered, shook Leadspitter by the shoulder as that worthy lay snoring with sagging mouth that revealed the carious teeth.

"Turn out!" he ordered. "Miss Raineaux wants you on deck!"

"Huh? What the hell?" grunted Leadspitter, fighting back to nebulous consciousness.

He dribbled disconnected oaths. In the vague lamplight from the main cabin, an ugly enough figure he made. As he sat up, hulking and loose shouldered in his bunk, he recognized the apparently unwarranted intruder, and his lip drew to a ferocious sneer.

"You swab headed son of a pup, what the devil you doin' down here?"

"Obeying orders!" Tyson returned. "Your second mate wants you on deck. Turn out and look alive!"

A moment's heavy silence. Leadspitter burst it with—

"You take a reef or two in that talk, or by the Judas Priest I'll learn you how to address an officer!" Leadspitter got heavily to his feet. "What's the matter o' Mr. Mayes, she don't call *him?*"

"Mr. Mayes is sound asleep," smiled Tyson, joyously impenitent. "His lights have gone out for awhile. Fact is, I've just knocked 'em out, myself. Good job! And you're wanted on deck." His voice ran acid with contempt. "Shake a leg!"

With a wordless bellow Leadspitter sprang and struck. Tyson warded off the blow.

"Hold on!" he cried. "If you force this—"

Leadspitter drove at him as a bull at a toreador. Tyson stopped him with a crash on the mouth that loosened all the bucko's front teeth and made the twisted lip spurt crimson—a crash that left Tyson's knuckles torn and bleeding.

"Come on!" laughed Tyson, joyous now of soul. "Might as well pay another debt, too, while I'm at it. Had to happen, sooner or later. *Let's go . . .*"

CHAPTER XI

GATHERING PORTENTS

MORNING found the *China Girl* still mogging along into the south southwest. A gray and ugly morning, that, with haze blurred horizons, the barometer falling, half a gale that drove flying cloud wracks through which with sinister light a cold sun shivered. Presages of storm upon the mighty waters companioned traces of another sort of tempest that had already devastated the old ship's cabin.

Much aboard the *China Girl* had changed. Though old Abey Buzzard had done his best to bring the cabin to rights, it still showed signs of battle royal. Two chairs had been ripped up from their screws, the sideboard had been smashed in, glassware broken; and not all Abey's scrubbing had quite cleaned away the blood.

The lazaret now held an occupant. This lazaret was a sort of well or compartment some five feet deep, at the extreme stern, immediately over the transom and reached by a hatch in the after part of the wheelhouse. In former days it had been used for stowing ore or bullion. Now the hatch cover had been removed, had been replaced by a wooden grating for ventilation. In the bottom of it lay Roderick Tyson, with "darbies" on his wrists and leg irons on his ankles, these latter padlocked to a ringbolt in the floor. A comfortable situation, that.

Chained there like an ape in this stuffy, unlighted compartment, Tyson still was smiling. Smiling, but none too handsomely. He had not emerged scatheless from combat. A torn ear, swollen jaw and purple lip add to no man's appearance. Comfort and solace for Tyson, however, lay in memories of even greater damage inflicted on Peter Mayes, in the consciousness of certain debts well paid, in recollections that it had taken Leadspitter, Boatswain Saltash, the Rock Scorpion and Jubal Tabry, bawlingly summoned aft on the run by Abey Buzzard, to make the irons and the lazaret realities.

"As a scrap, not too bad," mused Tyson. "Not bad at all. I'm satisfied!"

Far from satisfied was Leadspitter who now, nursing severe contusions, held the deck. A black "shiner" and a mashed nose, added to the irrevocable loss of one front tooth and the loosening of another, had profoundly impaired both his countenance and his prestige as a man mauler. And at this juncture, he knew he needed every ounce of that prestige.

"Trouble enough brewin' with them sons o' sea wolves forrard," he grimly pondered, standing in wet oilskins by the wheelhouse, under the ugly and cold light brooding that troubled sea. Now or again, dashes of spray skittered across him. "Trouble an' bobbery enough, a'ready, so I don't want no more!"

In the turmoil incident to the fight, during the inevitable letdown of discipline thereafter, Karlstad had found chance for a few illuminating words with him.

"Watch you'self, sir," the Swede had privily confided. "Half de men is ready to try an' jump you an' hit fer de ship. Dey ain't quite got de wind to do it yet, sir, but trouble's comin'. I ain't goin' to name no names, sir—but watch you'self!"

For the first time now Leadspitter was realizing that heavy perils menaced. He was understanding the significance of many an ugly look and muttered word when he had ordered Tyson into irons, comprehending that downright mutiny hung in the balance. Not that he cared half a fig for the *China Girl*, her cargo, orders, owner, anything of that. No; only one thing mattered—the contents of the safe. If he could just hang on, ride through to port and, after having disposed of the girl, make a clean getaway, nothing else would signify.

In evil mood he scanned cloud and ocean. Now that the blow had veered further to the west, the *China Girl* was sailing by the wind, with starboard tacks aboard. The rising seas often breached green over the forecastle head, swirled hissing round the deckhouse and came tumbling aft to the break of the poop. At times almost rail in to the clawing graybacks, the old ship staggered drunkenly, acreak, complaining in every time worn timber.

Walking to the wheelhouse, he passed a word with Tondern there. The Dane, he felt, was one he could depend on; a steady, serious and reliable shellback, from truck to keel.

"How's the steerin', Tondern?"

"Pooty good, sir. Ain't so sea kindly as some. Little stiff, kind o' like a half tide rock, sir, but I seen worse."

"All right. Watch your weather helm. Don't let her come up too close!"

HE RETURNED to the break of the poop and stood there ruminating the unpalatable, indigestible facts of the matter.

"Let 'em have the damn' ship, an' welcome!" he thought, with an especial bitterness against Tyson who, as it seemed, had brought things to a crux. "The bundle, the stuff, that's good enough for me, if I can only get away with it. Chuck the damn' gal an' get away with the rhino. Good enough for me, by Judas Priest!"

Easy enough to do, was it not? What, now that he stood in command, could prevent him from deciding that the ship was unseaworthy? Then did it not lie in his discretion to bear up for the nearest port, Santa Cruz, in latitude fifty?

But the counter thought shriveled and blasted his hopes—Captain Isaac Bohannon! To bring the captain ashore might mean that Bohannon would get well. And *that* would mean, for Leadspitter, the loss of two thirds of his pickings; all, perhaps.

"Damn his black soul to hell!" growled Leadspitter. "Why the devil's grandmother don't that old son of a scaldy kick off, slip his moorin's an' make a fetch of dyin'? He's got to be dead as bilge, that old son of a thief has, afore I'll be safe. So long's he got the breath o' life in his lousy old carcass, he's got me jammed on a lee shore."

This gave him further and even more bilious reflections as the laboring square rigger wallowed on and on. His thoughts were ugly thoughts indeed, consonant with strengthening menace of the wind, with gusty spits of rain that drove like leaden pellets. At the quarter deck rail he stood, glowering. Just aft of the main hatch a gang was monotonously toiling at the pump cranks. Round and round labored the flywheel. Bilge gushed on deck. Men's aching backs rose, fell, rose again. Grumbles and curses reached Leadspitter's ears.

"Hell wagon!"

"Fine, rub grubbin' job!"

"If we wasn't yaller spined cowards, we'd soon put an' end to *dis*—"

"Can't even git a decent mug up, an' them beggars aft livin' on the fat pig's back—'

"Stow that gab, you turnpike sailors!" Leadspitter flung at them, his mutilated face uglier than a Chinese joss. "D'ye hear, there? Stow it! You sodjers, you hay makin' landies! Don't you start gettin' dirty with *me*, or I'll learn you a thing or two, accordin' to Doyle!" He gave them, all and comprehensively, a sailor's blessing of the choicest. "You ain't worth hell room, not by the dozen. If there's any kickin' to be done here, I'll do it, savvy?"

Silenced, they kept on sweating at the pumps, but venomous looks and still moving lips told him their temper was vile as his own. And *that* was steadily growing viler. Leadspitter clearly saw how he was meshed and caught in tentacles of fate that mocked him. Now, when for the one and only time in his life fortune beckoned, two obstacles stood squarely across his course. The girl still lived; the captain would not die.

As for the girl—not so bad. Leadspitter felt thoroughly competent to get rid of the girl. Any dark night, now, would serve for an accident. But Captain Bohannon; how dispose of him? There, ah, there lay the rub.

"I aint so much chafed about any doin's them sons o' pups forrard might start," he tried to analyze the situation in his dull brain. "I got Tyson pegged down, anyhow, an' he's prob'ly the ringleader. It's the come to with Bohannon as fills me to the gunnels with trouble. How the hell am I goin' to send *him* across?"

Were Bohannon to come on deck by night the thing could be accomplished. But immobile, paralyzed, lying there dead yet alive in his bunk—in the berth to which Leadspitter had ordered him carried—how could he be safely disposed of? Damn Bohannon and the blood and vitality and life of him, and all the hard tenacity that kept his mechanism going!

Then Leadspitter had a thought. Thoughts, real ones, were rarities with him.

"I wonder," he reflected, "if another smash on his busted top hamper would turn the trick? Tyson, that piece o' God's carelessness, said pressure on his forepeak might finish him off. If I knew, if I only knew just how to work it, so it couldn't never be proved on me—"

With murder in his heart, Leadspitter weighed chances. The one powerful deterrent was that, if he killed Bohannon, it might be detected. Might be proved. Greatly he feared the skill, the acumen of Isora and of Tyson. Tyson! Another barrier! Tyson would love nothing better than to lay him by the heels. From his soul he cursed Tyson. Another one, eh, to be got rid of! Three living creatures stood between him and his treasure. Three! Even a harder ruffian than Leadspitter might shrink from three murders done in ice cold blood. Sweat prickled Leadspitter's battered brow.

"Hell!" he thought, his mind running, nosing like a dog at the paths of possibility. "Must be some way. I got to find some way, or I'll be mired an' muckered bad. Afore long we'll be down to the Straits. An' this here ship—I got my doubts about her, whether she'll round the Horn or not. But if I put into port, with them three alive, I might lose a hundred an' eighty thousand bucks, or

more. If I go ahead an' chance the Horn an' make it, an' get shet o' them three, I'm rich for life!" His hands clutched to fists, tightened, trembled. "The devil 'll see me through some way, if I could only heave Bohannon out o' my course."

Gloomy enough the prospect seemed. And yet a shining ray of hope lanced through. One of his opponents was after all only a woman. The others both lay helpless in his hands; one ironed in the lazaret, one paralyzed and dumb.

"Not so bad, that ain't, arfter all," he decided, grimly nodding. "If I got the guts of a louse, I'll go ahead, chance gettin' rid of 'em some way, and beatin' round the Horn. The devil 'll con me through. I'll make it somehow. Not so bad."

BY EIGHT bells of the morning watch, before which time the steadily rising wind had forced Leadspitter to shorten down to topsails, Peter Mayes had sufficiently recovered to take the deck. Leadspitter passed a few pregnant remarks with the Irishman.

"Well, Mr. Mayes," said he, in a low tone so that the man at the wheel should not overhear, "well, we got that there fire eatin' son of a pup, Tyson, 'bout where we want him now, eh? That there obstrapulous heavyweight champeen, we got the wind took out o' *his* sails, some, ain't we?"

"Sure, we have that, sir," Mayes agreed, speaking a little thickly by reason of a gorgeously swollen lip. "He won't cross *our* hawse again fer a spell. If my advice is worth anythin' to you, sir, you'll keep him where he's to, till we make port. Fact is," he added, "if that feller never come up out o' the lazaret, exceptin' what you might call feet first, 'twouldn't hurt my feelin's none, sir. Saints, no!"

"Right! We got him 'lemonated out o' the way, now, an' we better keep him 'lemonated. But 'twon't do to pull things too strong. I hear that cuss has got a friend or two forrard."

"More enemies, though. 'Count o' them callin' him a preacher an' the like o' that. An' then besides, he's slugged a few of 'em for pullin' raw stuff 'bout the girl. Sure, I think they're mostly all sore as boiled pups on him. His funeral 'd be a popular event, I'm thinkin'."

"So, eh? Hmmm!" And Leadspitter duly weighed this encouraging bit of analysis. "Well, we both to do a bit of thinkin'. Things has changed some. I been gettin' some news as ain't what you might call extryordinary good."

"How's that, sir?"

Leadspitter squinted at sky and sea before answering. Far off to windward, three or four Cape pigeons, the first they had sighted, bore silent witness to the fact that the south latitude was rapidly piling up. The chill of the air, almost a look as of impending snow in the dun clouds that veiled the sun, corroborated that observation.

"How's that, sir?" Peter Mayes reiterated. "What news you referrin' to now?"

"We got a bad bunch there, forrard, some of 'em. There's a few o' them hell fired farmers gettin' too big for their boots. They got to be took down a peg or two, that's what. Rounded to, brung to order. If they ain't—"

"Well, sir?"

"Lookee, Mr. Mayes!" And Leadspitter lowered his tone still more, spoke with an air of heavy import as they stood there together at the poop rail with the whole, spray swept run of the ship before them. "Lookee, now! I don't want to have the bad word, y'understand. Don't want to be what they calls a pessimus, but there's mutiny in the air. Wait, hold on! Let me tell you, now! I got this here straight, from an A-1 man, as knows. There's plenty talk o' mutinizin' forrard. If it started, I don't think it'd last as long as John Brown stayed in heaven, but we don't want it to start, not whatsomever!"

"Right, sir. We won't let it! We'd have 'em in the divil's own swithers, in less 'n no time, if it come to a manus. They'd think the seas was comin' over 'em from all p'ints o' the compass, to once! Sure, ain't we got all the guns?"

"That there, by the jumpin' Judas, is

what I don't know," Leadspitter admitted. "We got to get a purchase on ourselves, an' see what's what. 'Twouldn't supprise me none if there was two, three guns in the gang forrard. We got to get 'em, afore there's a come to, savvy? There's a few dunnage bags an' mattresses as has got to be looked into!"

"That so, eh? Wheoooo!" the Irishman whistled. "Faith, an' that's news, now! Well, I'll have a look round. Who d'ye think's most into this here?"

"Tyson, till we marled him down. Then there's the nigger. I wouldn't trust that black son of a dog as far as I could throw the anchor. An' that taxi driver, an' the Scorpion—two or three o' them kind, they're enough to rot a whole bunch. The look up ain't so good, Mr. Mayes, not till we gets to the bottom o' this here."

"*I'll* get to the bottom of it, sir," Peter assured him, "if I have to knock 'em all to jelly with a capstan bar. We'll have no guns forrard, an' no mutinizin' aboard *this* 'un. Holy Mother, no, sir!"

"Well, have a look, Mr. Mayes. If you can't manage it alone, call on the bosun. I'm ready to wade in, too. But mind, keep a stopper on your jaw. We can't have no word o' what we're suspicionin' get forrard, or things might break afore we're ready for 'em. You allus had kind of a long tongue. That's the Irish in you, I reckon. Well, take a close reef in it now!"

"No fear o' my talkin', sir," Peter Mayes assured him. "I'll get to it, right off—have a look. No use takin' chances now, sir."

"You're right for once. Get busy!"

Having said which, Leadspitter descended to the cabin.

HE FOUND Isora there, breakfasting on coffee and hardtack with a bit of jam.

"I'd like a word with you, sir," she said, flashing him an enigmatic glance as he cast off his oilskins and sou'wester, spray drenched and gleaming.

"All right! What's on your mind?" He flung his gear into his room, filled and lighted a pipe. "Stewart, a mug o' coffee an' some rum here. Look alive! Now then, sir?"

"That man you put in irons—"

"Well, what about him?" And Leadspitter slumped into a chair opposite her.

She kept a moment's silence, while old Abey fetched Leadspitter's coffee and rum. Leadspitter slopped the liquor into his mug, steaming hot, and gulped a mouthful.

"Ahhhh!" He wiped his battered mouth on his hand. "Well, what about him, then?"

"He's got to have his liberty."

"He—he's *what?*"

"Got to have his liberty. It won't do, keeping him in irons!"

She bent a coercive gaze on him, as he sat there staring at her with uncomprehending eyes. Her own were darkly thoughtful under the skylight gleam. Disconcertingly cool and determined she looked, as she repeated calmly—

"You mustn't keep him under hatches!"

Leadspitter's cup clattered to its saucer. Old Abey, pottering in his pantry, gave an attentive ear.

"I don't get you," Leadspitter made shift to articulate. "What's that you're sayin', now?"

Isora laughed oddly.

"Don't you understand English?" she quizzed. "I said, that man—Smith, Tyson, whoever he is—has got to be taken out of the lazaret. There, is that plain enough for you?"

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"I think it highly probable," the girl assented. "But that's not the point, now. The point is—"

"You mean, take that son of a gun up out o' there?"

"Just that. And right away, too!"

Leadspitter shoved cup and saucer away, leaned heavy elbows on the table.

"Are you crazy, or what?"

"No, just sensible. And—"

"My jumpin' Judas! You gettin' mushy on that swab?"

A dull flush mounted to the roots of her black hair, but her look held steady, coolly determined.

"Mushy, eh?" Leadspitter gibed, and laughed her to scorn. He reached for his cup, drained it off. "Well, you ain't the only one, from what I heard. There's been plenty more!"

"If you're less of a gentleman than I thought you, Mr. Furlong, I'm sorry for you."

"Oh, is that so?" Thriving anger made his eyes opaquely hard. "Who's runnin' this here ship, anyhow? I'm master here, an' don't you forget it! Don't you try no funny business aboard me, or you'll hit a reef! How long since an actin' cap'n takes orders from a second mate—without no papers, neither? You tell me now!"

"That's got nothing to do with this case," she returned, blenching not before his furious look. "Mr. Mayes insulted me, and Smith—Tyson—punished him. He had no right to, under marine law, but as a man he had. I think he made rather a neat job of it, too." She smiled oddly. "As for what he did to you—"

"Yeh! What I done to him, you mean!"

"You, and three or four others," she laughed. "If you hadn't had them at your back—but never mind. I sent him below to call you, after he knocked Mayes out. As an officer of this ship, I had a right to. You attacked him, and after that—"

"Say, you must be plumb off your nut!" Leadspitter's battered face grew a dark and ugly purple, his scar livid. "Off your nut, entire! Well, by God!"

"Swearing and getting nasty won't help you, Furlong. When the story comes out in court, as it will," she held her ground, "everything will be righted. But I'm disappointed in you and Mayes. Terribly disappointed. At first, the way you rescued me, and all, I thought—"

"Clew up! What you thought don't matter! I'm cap'n here now. I'm actin' inside my rights an' inside the law. That there gozaroo, he's ironed for assaultin' an officer, an' ironed he'll stay!" Leadspitter's ukase held irreversible determinations. "An' if you go disputin' my authority, you know what I'll do to you?"

"That doesn't matter at all, what you do to me. Put me in irons too, maybe?" Her mockery was salt to his wounded pride of authority. "That would be quite like you, wouldn't it, now?"

"Don't you get funny with me! No, I won't iron you, but I—I'll—"

"Well, what?"

"I'll disrate you. Take away all your authority, that's what I'll do!"

"No, you can't do that."

"Can't, eh? Why the devil can't I?"

"Because you don't dare to," she smiled, steady and cold. "Because you need me—my services. Let's talk facts. Mayes is no navigator at all. Getting the latitude is far beyond his powers, and even dead reckoning is a mystery to him. He's no better at that than Saltash. As for you, well, I know what *your* mathematics are. They're just next door to nothing. I've helped you out of enough muddles to know that an ordinary latitude sight is about your limit, and even at that you're none too reliable. As for a longitude time sight, you know as much about that as Mayes does about trigonometry."

"You hate yourself, don't you?" Leadspitter snarled with exacerbated rage. "You think you're somethin', what?"

"Facts are facts. You're not to be trusted in navigating a ship around the Horn. You don't even trust yourself. I'm your navigator. If you disrate me, I'll be just a passenger and needn't do a thing to help you. What's more, I won't!"

"We'll see about that, by Judas! We'll see!"

"Yes," she agreed, "I rather think we will!" She threw at him a look half angry, half amused. "Now, listen! You can take any action you see fit regarding Smith—Tyson, or whoever he is—when you make Valparaiso. But you're *not* going to keep him in irons! I can judge seamen, and he's far and away the best man in this ship!"

"That son of a double Dutchman? I'll

see him to Davy Jones afore I'll ever take him out of irons!"

"We'll all go to Davy Jones if you don't! You're short handed for good A-1 men. You need him on deck. And what's more, he's the only competent navigator aboard, except myself. I'll do nothing more for you unless you take him out of irons. Then you'll *have* to free him! You can't disrate me without letting him out, anyhow. So you see . . ."

"YOU'RE tryin' to boss me aboard my own ship?" he fulminated, but she knew him weakening, as under the circumstances weaken he must.

"I won't argue that point," she answered in a tone of finality. "I'll just give you one hour to think it over. It's now—" with a glance at the cabin clock—"it's now twenty-five past eight. Either that man's out of irons, and forward, by nine twenty-five, or you've got no navigator. That's all!"

"You mean you'll refuse duty?"

"Just that."

"As an officer o' this here ship, under my orders, that's a loggin' matter. Same as what *he* done!"

"Call it anything you like, Mr. Furlong," she laughed, her eyes brimming with a kind of reckless gaiety. "Call it mutiny, if you please. Log *him* as a mutineer, too. That'll be a pair of mutineers you'll have on your hands. A fine start for you, trying to work this leaky old tub round the Horn!"

"Who said I was goin' to take her round the Horn?" demanded Leadspitter, eager in his dull and confused way to befog the issue, to save what little face he could in this defeat. "You know a lot, don't you?" Red haired, uncouth and huge of shoulder, bruised, knocked about, he made an ugly enough figure under the cheerless gray gleam of the skylight. "How d'you know but what I'll declare her unseaworthy an' put in to Santa Cruz? Or try the other way, round the Cape of Good Hope?"

"And confess yourself a coward as well as an ignoramus? You're rather funny, aren't you?" she mocked with the joyance of victory. "Remember now, you've got just one hour to make up what you call your mind!"

"Burn me! Looka here, now, I ain't goin' to be stood down by the likes o' you! Not by no woman as ever—"

"The discussion's ended!"

On which word Isora got up from the table and went into her cabin, leaving Leadspitter to slouch and glower in his chair, pull at his pipe, order more rum and curse by all his gods or devils.

And as he drank and as he cursed, his brain a fog of hate and money lust, bafflement, murderous desires, ever the south Atlantic winds more boisterously assailed the laboring old *China Girl.*

CHAPTER XII

FORCES OF CONFLICT

SOME half hour later, as Leadspitter sat brooding and blaspheming to himself in the cabin that had been Bohannon's but now was his own, the door opened and Bohannon himself appeared there.

In shirt, trousers and stocking feet, half his head bandaged so that only one eye appeared, and with a scraggle of whiskers peppering his chin, a hard enough looking old sea dog Bohannon was. Wrinkled, aged, disfigured, he swayed unsteadily on shaking legs as the *China Girl* bucked the seas. But weak though the Old Man was, shaken and spent, the light of reason shone in his one visible eye. Feebly he held with his left hand, blue tattooed, gripping the door jamb; weakly with the right he groped, gesticulated.

At sight of this amazing apparation, for all Leadspitter's toughness, his heart stumbled in its beat.

"Well, for God's sake!" exclaimed he, staring as if at one risen from the dead. "That *you?* By the livin' jingo! What the devil *you* doin', out o' y'r bunk? What you want o' me?"

The captain made no answer save with

a kind of animal-like moaning, horrible, uncouth. He advanced unsteadily to his desk, clung and pawed there. Leadspitter sensed peril to his plans.

"Here now, me billygale!" he ejaculated with an oath. "None o' that! No monkey business—no buttin' in, now. You're sufferin' from mud on the liver, that's what. Top y'r boom along back to your bunk, an' anchor there, savvy? You ain't fit to be up, cruisin' round the like o' this." He gestured toward the captain's present cabin. "Start y'rself along back, in there!"

Obviously enough, Bohannon could understand nothing of Leadspitter's words. Language, to his ear, had become the same as to his tongue or eye. All power of grasping it, of communicating it had vanished. He seemed, though, to comprehend the gesture, and shook his bandaged head in refusal.

"*Ugh-wugh-wugh!*" he mouthed with flaccid lips, painfully struggling to articulate.

"Brisk as a bee in a tar pot, ain't you?" Leadspitter mocked, with a twisted grin. "Ain't that somethin', now? I'll say! You're the lucky one, though. Oughta be dead an' out o' your misery, by rights, but you're lucky, *you* are! So damn' lucky you could fall overboard an' come up dusty. Navigatin' round on your pins like a Christian, talkin' like a good 'un! By Judas Priest an' little fishes, if it ain't a proper marvel!"

Again the captain with palsied hand clawed at his desk, again with quivering effort battled for speech.

"That sure sounds fine," mocked Leadspitter, regaining some of his aplomb in face of the Old Man's utter helplessness. "Fine an' dandy it sounds! Only I don't get you, not whatever."

With blent malevolence and enjoyment he regarded his rival and enemy—the enemy of all his plans. His damaged teeth revealed themselves in a sneer of poisonous derision.

"That there you're talkin' is a lingo I don't savvy. Try me on Chinee!"

Bohannon's one eye darkened under its shaggy gray thatch of brow. Though Leadspitter's words made only an unmeaning noise to his ear, nevertheless his brain, wide awake, fully conscious, perceived that Leadspitter was gibing at him. His look was one of menace as he turned toward the safe, pointing, unsteadily gesturing.

"Oh, so that's how it stands afore the breeze, eh?" demanded Leadspitter, getting up and closing the door, lest old Abey might be pottering about and overhear. "Sufferin' squid! You want me to whack up the coin, eh? Want to get your sights to bear on it, do you, an' see it's still there, O.K.? Nothin' doin'! That there rhino is all mine now. Mine, you get me?"

Facing the captain, Leadspitter tapped his own breast.

"It's mine, old bucko, an' you're a stranded hulk on a lee shore! Looka here, now!"

From his pocket he hauled a key ring. On that ring dangled, with other keys, including the key to Tyson's handcuffs, the key of the ship's safe. Leadspitter tantalizingly shook the keys in the stricken captain's face. Then he tapped his head and vibrated his hand sidewise, as one who should say—

"That blow on your head—it finishes *you!*"

"*Wugh-ugh-ugh!*" mumbled Bohannon, a thin trickle on his gash of a mouth.

His voice, the voice of an idiot or a beast, mingled with the thrum of cordage, creak and murmur of straining timbers. No more coherently than they, could the captain now voice his thought.

Once more Bohannon, possessed by some mighty, some overpowering desire, struggled for utterance—and failed. Leadspitter thrust the keys back into his pocket and laughed, laughed with more vivid enjoyment than he had known in many days. Here, at all events, sparkled one bright crystal in the dull rock of his situation. Here was matter for exultant gladness—the spectacle of Bohannon's utter impotence to make known his thoughts.

Then a new idea struck Leadspitter.

"The Old Man, he's stood a power o' grief," reflected the mate, "but he ain't died yet. Mebbe he won't *have* to die. Mebbe I can get round that part of it, anyhow, the job of gettin' shet o' him some way!"

This now, ah, this was better. Prospects began to appear more roseate. Narrowly Leadspitter studied the helpless captain, by the dull and drab light through the cabin port. Perhaps, thought he, this injury might be permanent. Perhaps, as Tyson had said, it might at all events take months or years for Bohannon to recover powers of speech or writing. Even with medical help, even in port, the Old Man might continue unintelligible as a suckling. And, did he ever win back to speaking, long before then a hundred matters could transpire to cover Leadspitter's tracks.

Of a surety now, all this was fairer sailing to a safer harbor of success!

"Avast, there!" Leadspitter tried to check the captain's unformed mumblings. "I don't come within thirty-two compass p'ints o' your meanin'. Go to the devil an' stir a stump out o' here, back to y'r bunk. This is my busy day!"

BOHANNON, however, manifested no intention of being thus cavalierly disposed of. Whatever his message or demand, Leadspitter could see with half an eye that the driving power of the Old Man's thought was determined and dynamic. Terror lurked in the captain's one visible eye, the terror of an animal caught and trapped, previsioning death.

He began trying to open the desk drawer where the ship's manifest and log and some of the charts were kept. In effect he really did get it open, for this drawer was not locked and, moving like a disjointed marionette, spread one chart on the desk top across a ruck of papers and litter there. The chart humped up even over a tumbler with sticky dregs of rum at the bottom.

"What the devil's eatin' you now?" demanded Leadspitter with some heat. This persistent effort, this tampering with effects he now considered his own had commenced to blow up his embers of wrath into a blaze. "You better lay off there! You're moored for good, in Rotten Row. Say nothin', do nothin'. Silence is golden, ain't it? An' don't that make you rich as Grease-us, or whoever?"

This gibing all was lost on the captain. With dogged, amazing fortitude he haltingly and with jerky motions shoved a book upon either end of the chart, to hold it somewhat flat. The chart lay bottom-side up, but this meant nothing to Bohannon. For him, delineation had ceased to possess the slightest significance, just as words had ceased. His physical eye remained; but in his brain, in that subtle and mystic nexus known as the fissure of Sylvius, a tiny clot had blurred language and pictorial forms, all things linguistic or of drawn and written character. His blindness, the inner blindness of the cortex, still remained absolute along these categories.

Still however, Bohannon knew a chart. He knew the uses of a chart and what a chart signified. His thought still remained intact, forceful, though pent within walls impermeable as solid steel. Now he tried to focus his one eye on the chart, battled to see something there, to recognize something. In vain! Just as he could distinguish a chair from a doorway or a man, he could identify the chart from the books that held it roughly flat; but words, letters, figures, outlines on that chart all had sunk into gray blurs of incoherence, into a chaos of unmeaning and fantastic complication.

"Lay off that!" growled Leadspitter, with rising temper. "You don't know enough to pound sand in a rat hole. You're *done*, see? So, by the Judas, you better lay off—an' lay up!"

The agonized efforts of Bohannon to make his thought and his imperative desire understood might have melted any adamantine heart; but Leadspitter's heart was unmeltable. Through his increasing anger he found some modicum of grisly

diversion in the Old Man's futile struggle. Avaricious, cruel with the cold malignity of an octopus, he watched; he joyed in watching this humiliating and painful scene.

Bohannon was thinking:

"For God's sake, put back! We can't weather the Horn—it's certain death! Put back!"

This thought, though, how could it find expression? Neither in word nor writing could it win through the barriers of inhibition. Matter of life or of death though it was, there it remained sealed and pent, uncommunicated, incommunicable.

A SWEAT of torment oozed under the bandages and glistened on the pain knit forehead. The captain's hand, tattooed with its blue foul anchor, twitched and quivered, tore the chart, as from his throat issued horrible and simian noises.

"Cut that out!" cried Leadspitter, suddenly galvanized into action. "Clew up, you! I ain't goin' to have them charts tore, not by you, nor nobody, an' you can lay to that, solid!"

He snatched the chart away from Bohannon, rolled it up, flung it upon his bunk. Then seizing Bohannon by an arm, he thrust him out of the cabin, shoved him across the swaying floor of the larger one, and so to the room now Bohannon's.

There, growling anathema, he forced the Old Man into his bunk, pushed him down roughly, menaced him with doubled fist.

"Damn your old buckoin' soul to hell!" he spat. "You get down there an' stay down! I'm ridin' this one now, an' don't you forget it, if you know what's good for you, you bald headed old son of a sculpin!"

With angry light glowering in his eyes, he turned, slammed the door as he went out into the main cabin, and stood a moment pondering.

"Got *him* where I want him for a spell!" thought he. "Things ain't so far off the mark, after all. I reckon I can put it over as forelaid, all right. Not so bad, eh?"

His face, however, darkened as he glimpsed the clock. For now the hands marked nine-twenty. Only five minutes remained in which either to obey the girl, and liberate Tyson, or have two mutineers on his hands instead of one. Two—the only competent navigators aboard. Swiftly Leadspitter's mood changed.

He remained a moment poisonously considering. Then jolting out a foul curse against both the girl and Tyson, he turned to the companionway and mounted on deck.

There Peter Mayes was on watch. Leadspitter found himself confronted by the humiliation of having to tell Mayes what was in the wind.

"Sure, you ain't—you ain't goin' to let that scruff out o' irons, sir?" demanded Mayes, astonished and indignant.

"Got to," Leadspitter admitted. "I'm jammed up, for fair. Can't bring things to bear no other way. She's got us on a lee shore, that she devil has."

"Faith, before I'd let a woman be dictatin' to *me*—"

"Stow that! By the look o' your figgerhead, you've had a taste o' rough weather yourself, along o' her. She wants Tyson took out, an' we got to do it. No two ways about *that*. But we'll overhaul 'em both, afore long. It'll all come out in the wash. We'll learn 'em a thing or two, yet, afore we're through up with 'em. By the jumpin' Judas H. Priest, we will!"

On which threat, blustered out with as extreme face, saving violence as he could muster, he entered the wheelhouse, removed the grating of the lazaret and descended into that darksome, fetid hole.

"COME on out o' that now, you lousy beggar!" he growled at Tyson. "I'm goin' to take them bracelets off o' you. Not, y'understand, as how the charges aginst you is dismissed. You'll get all that's comin' to you later. But I'm goin' to take the darbies off now.

You'll lay forrard an' turn to, for duty!"

"Interesting, if true," mocked Tyson.

He peered up at Leadspitter, from where he was sitting on the damp deck planking in the gloom, with wrists manacled and leg irons padlocked to a ringbolt. His bruised and swollen jaw, mutilated ear and purple lip, plus a staring bristle of beard, contrived to make him look one of the most ruffianly scoundrels unhanged. In that place of foul air, malodorous of fusty stores, he appeared entirely different from the trim and well conditioned shipmaster of other days.

"Interesting, if true. But is it true? That, ah, that's the question now!"

"What ye mean, true?" Leadspitter demanded. "Makin' me out a liar? Watch y'rself, or—"

"You're an amusing cuss, aren't you, Leadspitter?" Tyson laughed. "Flying around like a paper man in a gale o' wind! First you bellow and roar that you're going to keep me ironed till we get to port. And then, inside a few hours, you say you're going to turn me to again. Whence this truly Christian change of heart?"

"None o' your damn' business!" blustered Leadspitter. "An' none o' your lip, neither!"

"My lip doesn't look any worse than yours, I reckon. By the way, how are you? Toothache keep you awake any? There's one tooth, anyhow, you'll never feel again, that's a comfort. Isn't it now, old man?"

"Shut up, you, afore I shut you up!" Leadspitter produced his keyring. But Tyson shook a head of refusal. "Come along, you!"

"Nothing doing!" he declared. "I'm going to leave well enough alone and stick right here, that's what I am!"

"*Huh?*"

"You heard me! This is the life o' Reilly, all right, compared to going back to the focsle and duty. I'm not so keen on working! Stick those keys back in your pocket! I'm all right just where I am. There's nothing more you can do to me here, except starve me, and you don't dare do that. Good sea law about that, Leadspitter!" Mockingly the prisoner laughed. "You've got to give me full rations, anyhow."

"You damn' sea lawyer! I'll give you hell! Much more o' your gab, an' I'll bust your haslet out, that's what I'll do!"

"Very likely. A coward like you, I wouldn't put it past you, striking a man in irons, or even murdering one and chucking him overboard. Mayes insults a woman, and you threaten a helpless prisoner. You're a fine pair! The devil's proud of you, if nobody else is. But go to it, Leadspitter. You've got a big enough score to settle, as it is, when we make port. Pile on some more. Crack on all sail for jail or the gallows! You've got thick neck, but it'll maybe stretch some, at that!"

Leadspitter shook a bruised fist in Tyson's face. Tyson only laughed him to scorn.

"I'd give my pay to have you hit me," he declared. "What 'd happen to you, for it—"

"Clew up!" Leadspitter snarled, beaten, helpless. "I ain't here to argy with you. I'm here to take them there irons off, an' burn me, take 'em off I'm goin' to!"

"I'll think it over whether you're going to or not," Tyson retorted, wholly unmoved. "Of course I can't stop you from unlocking 'em. You and some more of your sweet scented friends can drag me forrard. But how can you make me work? That, ah, that's the question? Once I'm in the focsle I can lie back and be a passenger. Fine! You can't starve me there. You can't punish me without starting a mutiny. Hell's ready to pop, anyhow. All you can do is just iron me again. Put me right back where I am now. And there you are, sweetheart. There you are!"

HAMSTRUNG, Leadspitter could only blaspheme.

"See here, old man," put in Tyson, his voice blending with the voices of sea and ship, loud in this narrow room at the extreme stern, "there's one thing

you *can* do for me, anyhow. By gad, I'd appreciate it, too!"

"What's that, you—"

"Never mind describing me any more. What can you do for me? Just one thing. Make your clearance out o' here! The air's foul enough in this lazaret, anyhow, without your poisoning it still more!"

An ecstasy of rage muted Leadspitter. He could only stand and gasp and stare, outplayed, beaten, helpless.

"Who ordered you to release me?" Tyson suddenly shot at him, with a sudden flair for the truth. "Come on, now, let's have it!"

"Huh—who—"

"I'll bet something," the prisoner pithily declared, "it wasn't your own bright little idea. Who gave the order? Who was it now?"

"Nobody, damn you!"

"You being by nature so truthful, of course I couldn't suspect that's wide o' the gospel. Was it Miss Raineaux?"

"I—she—"

Tyson's laugh plunged the hot probes of torment through Leadspitter's soul. The man fair writhed with it.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tyson. "More and better, all the time! Well, you *are* scudding before a gale of trouble, aren't you? It's tough, old man, tough as the devil's toenails. A six foot six, red headed old bucko like you, taking petticoat orders! Hmmm! Captain Nancy Ann, she cracks the whip and you jump, eh? Sad case, very!"

Leadspitter flushed brickily. His broken and yellow teeth showed in a wolfish grimace.

"I'll tear the heart out o' you for this!"

"If you're no better as a heart tearer than Mayes is as a heart smasher," Tyson laughed, "I should worry! Well, take the irons off. That girl's got some good reason. She figures I'm needed, likely. Take 'em off, darling. You can kiss me, too, if you want to!"

Leadspitter, wheezing in his throat with a tumult of rage that now choked speech, wrenched the handcuffs round, fitted the key with a shaking hand, snapped them open. He tore them from Tyson's wrists. Tyson rubbed his ridged flesh, and whistled to himself a little air.

Thrusting the bunch of keys at him, Leadspitter, his face black with murderous hate, commanded:

"Now take them there leg irons off!"

"No, thanks! That's *your* job."

"If you think I'm goin' to get down on my knees afore you—"

Tyson smiled, and interrupted—

"That's just what you're going to do, precious, or here I stay!"

Raging with humiliation, Leadspitter balked. But harsh necessity constrained him, and he had to yield. He knelt, fumbled the padlock, opened it. Tyson laughed mordantly.

"While you're down on your prayer handles, dearest, you might as well say a prayer or two. You'll need 'em before you ever make Valparaiso!"

"No prayers!" retorted Leadspitter, almost in an apoplexy. "No fear! That's your job, you snivelin' parson. Get up out o' that, now, an' go forrard!"

Leisurely Tyson arose, stretched his powerful arms, and yawned.

"Quite a cozy, sociable little time we're having, aren't we?" he queried, steadying himself against the reeling heave and roll of the ship. "And there's more and better coming, if I don't miss my guess. Coming, that is, if I don't stop it!"

Leadspitter lowered his voice:

"What d'you mean by that, damn you? Somethin' forrard?"

"Nothing that I'll tell *you!* But—" and his tone subtly altered— "but mark this. It's not you that's sending me forward. It's not the girl's orders either. If I've made up my mind to go, it's—well—something different."

"An' what's that?"

"If you knew, you'd know," Tyson cryptically retorted. "Stand clear, now, and let me up out o' this!"

He elbowed Leadspitter aside and hauled himself up through the lazaret hatch.

Leadspitter followed him, downright sick with rage.

THAT rage increased when Tyson, instead of going down the poop ladder and so away forward, turned to the cabin companion.

"Here!" shouted Leadspitter. "Where the hell you goin'?"

"Where I please, and no permission asked, either," Tyson laughed, and on the word, descended to the cabin with an air as if he owned it.

"Holy Mother!" Peter Mayes ejaculated, his jaw dropping, eyes fair popping from his head. "If he ain't the reg'lar out an' outer, now!" At the wheel, Stackhouse permitted himself a furtive chuckle. "An' you're allowin' that, sir?"

Leadspitter gave no answer. It is doubtful that he could have given any, could have articulated coherent words. Down after Tyson he plunged, with murder in his heart.

He found Tyson looking at Isora, and Isora looking at the clock. As Leadspitter slammed into the cabin, the girl swung round and fixed a dark, disapproving eye on him.

"You're six minutes late, Mr. Furlong," she announced in a clipped tone.

"Couldn't help it, Miss," Leadspitter stammered. "He—him—he wouldn't come, first off. I had to argy with him some!"

"Did, eh?" Her look, lustrous as a black opal, hinted at amusement. "Well, I see you persuaded him?"

"Pardon me! Not at all!" Tyson cut in. "Nothing this fellow here could say to me could possibly have any weight. I confess I didn't even pay much attention to the fact that you wanted me out of irons. There's another element in the case altogether. Something that, now I've got the chance, makes me want to get back to the focsle again."

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded, with a glance incisively penetrant.

"I'm nothing but a common forem'st hand, remember," he answered. "No explanations can come from me, as such. I'm bound by the ethics of the focsle. If I were aft, that would be different. But as it is, I've nothing to say."

"Ethics," the girl repeated. "Element. Those are strange words to hear in a place like this!"

"Aren't they?" smiled Tyson. His battered face lighted up with amusement. "The whole situation's very peculiar. Rather enjoyable, though. Something altogether new in my experience. And—but I'll say no more. I just came down to thank you for telling this fellow here to take the rather uncomfortable hardware off me. I'm off, now—forward to the other dogs."

With no further word he turned, clumped up the companionway in his heavy sea boots, vanished. Leadspitter, his bunged up eyes glowing with hate, peered after him.

Profoundly aloof, yet smiling a little oddly, the girl sat by the cabin table. Her pondering eyes seemed to look through the cabin bulkheads, out and away to far immensities of air and sky and agelessly immortal sea.

CHAPTER XIII

BLACK THOUGHTS AND HEAVY WEATHER

TYSON, returning forward with the honors of war, heard strains of accordion melody and likewise song, as Noah Landerry played an asthmatic accompaniment for Doc Chubbock. The cook was salving a heart temporarily homesick for his native Newfoundland by rendering what he called "a feelin' thing":

"Dere's a wealth o' pure affection
An' of rale perspective j'y,
Dat lingers round me evverywheres I roam!
I've a tinder recollection
Of places when a b'y,
Dat makes me t'ink of home, sweet home!

"Evvery winder, evvery door,
Evvery nail beneat' de floor,
Evvery cornder from de kitchen to de hall,
Is engreaved upon me heart,
From me memory never to paaaart,
Like de mottoes as is framed upon de wall!

"God bliss our home; in heaven we trust;
Kind words are welcome to all;
Love one anodder; what is home widout a mudder,
Are de mottoes as is framed upon de wall!"

Song ceased and accordion died away in a diminuendo squawk as Tyson appeared at the galley door, looking considerably knocked about but still smiling.

"How about a mug up, eh?" he queried. "I'm dry as the heart of a mainm'st. Could eat even some o' the gurry they call grub aboard here. Anything doing?"

"Well, I'll be hook blocked if it ain't you!" Chubbock exclaimed, his brown and wrinkled face cracking into a grin. "You ketched me ahl of a floption. Didn't 'spect to see you agin till us made port, or whativer!"

"Them skunks, aft, they couldn't keep *him* in irons," affirmed Noah, with a couple of intakes from his pipe. "They're needin' him too bad, to work ship. They might's well try to whistle jigs to the capstan as git along without him! Ain't that so, Smith, or Tyson, or whoever the divil you are?"

"I've got nothing to say. Thanks for the feed!"

Chubbock gave him hardtack and coffee. The cook and Sails Landerry watched him with keen interest, as he munched the biscuit and drank the coffee out—the interest of all humans for a fighting man.

" 'Twere a grand rookus!" Chubbock affirmed, nodding. "From what de bosun said, 'twere a shoutin' tangle fair wonnerful an' beyend ahl. Man, dear! Dey had it evvery way. Went at 'un ravinis; but he'd of turned 'em in ahl standin', if dere hadn't been too many fer him. I 'spects dem officers loves 'un now, like you'd love a wasp in y'r nose, eh?"

"Lucky, I calls him," judged Landerry from where he sat on an empty box. He kept torturing an occasional hit or miss discord from the afflicted accordion. "He's one o' them lucky fellers as you can't keep down. So lucky he'd fall overboard an' come up with a fish in his mouth, that's what. He roussed 'em around proper. He did, so!"

"I passes him A-1 from keel to truck, as a scrapper," the cook proudly affirmed. "I wouldn't want un to be no arched enemy o' *mine!* My glorianna, no, sir! He nigh an' handy to brung Mayes an' Leadspitter on deir beam ends. If us had more de likes o' him aburd dis yere hell wagon, dere'd be less buckoin' an' belayin' pin soup. Man, dear!"

Tyson made no comment, but thanked old Chubbock once more for his mug up, and swung off along the heaving deck all swept with wind driven machine gun burst of spray, to the forecastle. Entering abruptly, he found rather a disconcerting reversal of opinion in store for him.

"Hey, look who's here, b'ys!" shouted Boston Irish from where he sat at the table. "Hail to the chief! Sure, ain't he a chief, now? Welcome to our happy home!" Boston waved his hand, tattooed with the Sacred Heart, in token of enthusiastic greeting.

"Dissa boy, he show 'em t'ing or two!" Viterbo, the paper hanging Italian, warmly declared. The Finn removed his willowwood pipe from his teeth and made sounds indicative of satisfaction.

"You're the feller to show them hellions a few tricks!" declared the taxi driver. "You must ha' took hold of 'em pretty good an' proper!"

The Cockney exulted:

"Blimey, 'e got 'em rampin' mad, that's wot he done! '*E* fisted 'em, perish my pinkies, yus! Knocked 'em off their bloomin' chump, 'e did!"

All smiles, he fingered his sick mustache; and his anaemic, hollow face twisted with malice against the officers. Vicariously he was licking them himself; or at all events putting up the same battle that Tyson had waged. Thus do weak men find compensations for their infirmity.

"They 'ad to let yer out o' clink, wot?"

"Something like that," Tyson curtly replied.

He took his pipe from the little shelf he had rigged in his bunk. Half a dozen plugs of tobacco advanced toward him in half a dozen friendly hands. But he only took his own, chipped a pipeful, rubbed it and lighted up.

"Something like that," he repeated, drawing the pipe to a glow. "But if you think I'm going to spin you a yarn about it, you've got another think coming."

"Ah, don't try to high hat dis bunch," the gunman growled from the bunk where he had been indulging rosy dreams of violence and loot. "You're a right guy, even if you do talk like a book, so don't t'row no dog wit' us!"

"Sure, he'd of cleaned out de bote of 'em," declared Boston, "if the bosun an' Tabry an' the Scorpion hadn't piled on, too. The bosun—I s'pose he had to, bein' kind of an officer, like. But damn Tabry an' the Scorpion for a couple o' scabs!"

Tabry, on watch, escaped this criticism. The Scorpion, however, was there present and thought best to hold his peace. Circumstances were against him. He had involuntarily been caught up into the maw of war and now was sorry for it. But in this state of public opinion he felt that anything he might say would be used against him and wisely held silence.

"Chee!" exclaimed the gunman, "I hope yuh lay 'em out, now—dem rats from de focsle, here, dat done yuh dirt!"

" 'Ow about it, myty?" the Cockney asked, blinking with reddened lids. "Goin' to get even up with 'em, wot?"

Tyson only continued smoking in silence.

"Faith, if you don't, we will!" Boston promised, with a crackling oath. "Damn' skipper lickin' pups! You're one of us now, kid. I always knew ye had the fightin' stuff in ye. *You* ain't no parson!"

"If 'e is, 'e's a scrappin' parson, anyhow, an' gorblimy, that tykes all the jinker off 'im. 'E might even 'ave 'is master's pypers, like 'e says. No matter. 'E come near killin' Leadspitter an' Mayes. That's good enough fer *me!*"

"Atta boy!" exclaimed the taxi driver.

For a moment silence held that cheerless, narrow space.

Into this silence broke the gunman's voice, low pitched, cautious, surcharged with meaning:

"Dis here guy, he's a right guy. He'll stick an' slug. Say, wit' him to back us, we can put it acrost, dead easy. Cinch! Wit' him to navigate fer us—"

INSTANTLY Tyson's indifference vanished. A sudden wind of eagerness once for all to come at the core of mutinous plans there forming blew Tyson's mind free of broodings, as a gale dissipates fog.

"What do you fellows mean, anyhow?" he demanded. "What's doing, and where do I fit?"

"Sure, only a crazy man 'd try to fetch this here old choppin' tray round the Horn!" exclaimed Boston. "Hell wagon! Rotten grub an' quarters, scrappin' officers, an' all the bad luck signs we had—It's all off with the big goose, it's Davy Jones fer the lot of us, if Leadspitter tries to round old Cape Stiff in this here tub!"

"Well, and what then?" Tyson queried in a grimmish tone, blowing smoke. "Cut out the riddles and get down to brass tacks! I've been getting a few hints, the past few days, about my navigating for some o' you. What's the idea?"

"Take the ship, chuck the officers in the drink, an' beat it!" returned Boston, with admirable terseness.

"I see," remarked Tyson, while a breathless eagerness held them all in its vise. "You've got it all rigged up, proper, haven't you? But look you, Boston! Mayes is an Irishman, like yourself. You wouldn't chuck another son o' the old sod, would you, now?"

"Wouldn't I, though?" Boston leaned nearer. "Faith an' I would, then—a Mick like him! Black Liverpool tad!"

"Put an Irishman on the spit—" Tyson laughed—"and there'll always two be on hand to turn him. All right, what's next? What d' you mean by beating it? Where to?"

"Any old place, exceptin' round the Horn!"

"You weren't around when common sense was being given out," judged Tyson. "I guess none o' you were. Great Scott, no! It's not such a cinch as you think to take a ship and get away clear, anywhere. First port you made, you'd be in

jail inside of a few hours—and after that, five or ten years playing checkers with your noses against iron bars. Not so nice, eh?"

"Ah, ferget dat!" the gunman exclaimed with a cackle of uneasy laughter. "Who said anyt'ing about goin' to a port? Dere's plenty other places to go, 'sides a port!"

"You mean, beach her somewhere?"

"Sure, an' scatter out," the taxi man cut in. "That's the idea, old kick!"

"Don't feed us dat iron bar stuff," added the gunman, with scorn. "Yuh can't t'row no scare into dis bunch, wit' dat kind o' bull!"

Carefully Tyson pondered, seeming to weigh heavy matters in his mind. He broke the growing silence with:

"You fellows better get some sea legs of common sense under you. Chances are mighty slim to get away with anything these days of wireless and all that. First thing you know, I don't care where you head for, you'll be brought up all standing."

"Damn that!" Boston retorted. "Faith, we're goin' to make a try fer it anyhow. It's a say so fer all hands here, an' some as ain't here now. Come on!" he added, exigently. "Give us a lift! Take charge o' the navigatin' after we done the job!"

"Do the job first," laughed Tyson, dryly, "and then I'll see. But it'll be *some* job! You're up against some tough, hard hitting, straight shooting buckos, aft there. And without guns, yourself—"

"Who says we ain't got no guns?" the taxi driver demanded.

"Have you?"

"We ain't tellin' you nothin', till we're wise to how you stand. But—"

"Never mind. Even if you're armed, what then? You'll be rounded up, sure, sooner or later."

"Ah, ferget it!" snarled the gunman, while outside the forecastle wind and wave struck with ever more insistent malice, and teeth of gray seas worried the ship till she twisted, rolled, careened as if in anguish that her many voiced complaints of hull, spar and rig seemed to protest. "Ferget it, see? Dis here's too good a bundle to miss! Besides de skoit, dat some one 'd have—" a word that darkened Tyson's eye—"dere's all kinds o' kale in de safe! Money to boin! Enough fer all, an' den some. You come in on dis, kid, an' you'll get your split, too!"

"Blimey, yus!" the Cockney chimed in, redly blinking. "Divvy up the brass, all 'ands as 'elps! You must be orf your bloomin' chump, myty, not to 'elp us now. We can steer for H'africa, cawn't we? H'I been there—west coast, round Walfisch Bay, an' that. Beach 'er some'res, burn 'er, divvy up, and 'op it! It's mybe ten or twenty years in clink, if caught, but H'I'll tyke my chance on that, 'fore drowndin' off the 'Orn!"

"Suicide, that's what it is," added Boston. "Tryin' the Horn, this time o' year, in this here rotten old sieve. Faith, it wouldn't surprise me if this here ship an' cargo was all over insured, an' sent a-purpose to get lost somewheres off Terry del Fuego or the like o' that!" Violently he gesticulated, in the half light of that cheerless forecastle. "Things has been done like that 'fore now, an'—"

"Yus," added the Cockney, "an' they s'y the h'owner is a skinflint as 'd be h'up to any crooked gyme, murder an' drowndin' an' h'all!"

"You give my uncle a pleasant little reputation, don't you?" Tyson laughed. "Must be a likeable old gentleman, eh?"

"Snap out o' dat!" the gangster ordered. "Dat uncle bull—dat don't go here, see?"

"Well, forgetting the uncle, then," answered Tyson, relighting his pipe, "you can count me out of your pleasant little mutiny. Mutiny isn't in my line."

"FAITH, that's a quare breeze ye're blowin', now!" Boston exclaimed. "A man as has just beat up the actin' cap'n an' the mate—been put in irons fer it, too—sure, *he* wouldn't mutinize! He'd be too damn' nice an' lily handed fer mutiny, *he* would! Why, ye

poor fool—" and Boston's voice shrilled with growing anger—"ye're logged as a mutineer a'ready, ain't you? Or somethin' near it! What more 'd you get by way o' punishment if you was to come right out flat foot an' chuck in your luck with us?"

"Well?" grunted Tyson. "Heave ahead!"

"You'd get clear of any punishment, likely! An' what's more, get your slice o' the bundle, a lot o' good dollars in your jeans! Besides gettin' even' up with them lousy squeezers, aft. Well, what say?"

"Mutiny's a damned serious matter."

Tyson, his brow wrinkled with concentrated thought, looked from face to brutish face, weighing, judging chances.

"You fellows may find you're putting your hands out farther than you can draw 'em back. You haven't got the wind to do this job yourselves, so you want to drag me into it, too. Well, you can't do it, boys. Bring your mutiny to bear, if you can, but count me out of it!"

"Jeeze sake, you're a hot sketch!" cried the taximan. "Next thing we know, you'll be blabbin' aft, snitchin' on us!" His face contracted passionately. "Piggin' on us, eh?"

"You're a liar!" Tyson retorted. "My tongue isn't long enough to cut my own throat!"

"Gorblimey!" threatened the Cockney. "If you blow the roast, you'll wish you'd be borned a corpus!"

"Stow that! I've told you I wouldn't snitch, and I won't. It's no butter off my bread, either way, mutiny or no mutiny. Only I'm out of it—that's all!"

"Yes, but are ye?" Boston insisted. They had gradually closed in, toward Tyson, gathered about his bunk, with wolfish and ugly faces dim seen in the sickly clair-obscure of the forecastle. "Faith, after we take the ship, ye'll either have to be wid us or aginst us. Ye'll have to navigate like we say, or it'll be the high dive fer you!"

"Indeed?" retorted Tyson. "That's interesting!"

"Here you, don't be threatenin' the man!" advised the taxi driver. "You know damn' well we can't afford to chuck him over—not while he's got the stuff we need, in his bean, to get us somewheres!"

" 'E might 'ave the 'ole bloomin' Nautical H'almanac in 'is bean," the Cockney declared, "but if 'e cyn't to be depended on—"

"Stow that!" exclaimed Tyson with some heat. "Listen to me, now. *If* you take the ship, and make me navigate, that's one thing. All right! But my taking part in your mutiny, that's another. Now do you know?"

"You ain't givin' us a hint, eh?" Boston demanded. "As how if we do the job, you'll help us out?"

"Lord, but you men are thick! Of course I'll navigate, for anybody that controls the ship. Under compulsion, though. You all mark my words—under compulsion! That'll wash in court, all right!"

"To Africa?" queried Boston. "You'll steer us to Africa?"

"I didn't say so! This is my uncle's ship, and she's routed round the Horn. That's where she's going, sound or rotten. Round the Horn!"

"The hell she is! She's goin' where we say, or *you'll* go to the bottom! Why, you—"

THE FORECASTLE door, slamming violently open, put a sudden end to this passage at arms.

"All hands, shorten sail!" vociferated Saltash, thrusting in his head with water streaming from his brows and stringy gray mustache.

Behind him appeared a ghostly gray and rain hatched obscurity. As the racing ship careened to the blast, heeling so that her lee channels scooped white boiling swirls, a universe of churning waves grew visible, away to the skirts of a horizon black scowling, ominous. Then, with the reverse lurch, as the *China Girl's* spars cut swift patterns against fleeing cirrus cloud wracks that scurried in broken battalions, all vanished save the sky against which Saltash seemed

projected, a gaunt and angry figure with brine spinning, smoking from oilskins and sou'wester.

"All hands!" he shouted again. "Look alive, now! Start y'rselves, bullies! Got to get the canvas off her! Come on now, shake a leg!"

Growling, obscenely cursing, yet still held by the iron bands of discipline, the malcontents boggled into such heavy weather clothing as they had and stumbled out, Tyson among them. Out they struggled upon a deck that giddily danced. With cold brine sucking and soughing about their boots, they tramped hurriedly, leaning against the weight of the wind, to join the watch already preparing to shorten down. Blaspheming, they hastened to do their masters' stern bidding.

MORNING, bitter and dour, a cold gray vagueness that spread its monochrome over miles of wind tortured, turbulent sea, found the old *China Girl* still fleeing. Under the menace of an unnatural, livid daylight that seemed to swallow the world in threatening obscurity, she drove with squared yards dead before the gale.

Hurled to southward and eastward, over hissing white seethes that blinded the almighty waters, she shuddered away, plunging under the buffets of tremendous shocks.

Dicing with death, she ran. All the canvas she now carried was the reefed foresail, reefed fore and maintopsail, and fore topmaststaysail. The broil of following graybacks, that had built to ominous and crashing heights, battered her along, once in a way almost sweeping her afterworks. In that event, racked and time worn as she was, hard would her case have been, short indeed her shrift. Driven under, smashed down, she would have foundered on the instant; plunged with all hands to the grave that old Jason Mellish had planned for her. The grave that he had hoped for before the agony had come upon him of knowing that his nephew, the one human creature that in all the world he loved, must share her destiny.

On deck, only three men were active; Leadspitter, who kept watch, clinging to the mizzen shrouds to windward of the wheelhouse; then, in that house and at the wheel, Karlstad as one of the few reliables; and finally one of the wastrels at the lee helm, to bear a hand with the Swede.

Save for these three, the ship appeared deserted. Continually swept by the tops of boarding breakers, gray and frothingly ravenous, the *China Girl* drunkenly wallowed, her waist a constant sluice of brine that breached over both high bulwarks, swirled across hatches, boiled about deckhouse, water tank, pumps and mainmast. Drunkenly indeed; for now that pumping was no longer possible, the leak, notably increased by opening seams, had begun rapidly gaining. Prospects loomed dark, as never yet for this once stanch but now perishing old veteran of the seven seas.

Toward the end of the morning watch Isora came on deck. Though it was still half an hour before she was to go on duty she preferred the wide circle of tormented sea and sky to the pent oppression of the cabin where she could hear the raucous snoring of Peter Mayes in his room and where Captain Bohannon had been sorely fraying her nerves.

Bohannon, now recovering somewhat of his bodily strength, had been making more desperate efforts than ever to get himself understood.

This morning he had once more struggled out of his berth and had made his way staggeringly into the cabin that had been his but now was Leadspitter's. Thence he had again dragged out charts, and had spread them on the table in the main cabin; had forced her to try and understand him. With an eagerness that had feverishly pulsed, he had ineffectually sought to point out something. A ferocity of vain endeavor had lain in the depths of his one gimlet eye. His thin gash of a mouth had fought to express some meaning.

These abortive attempts had been uncanny and almost terrifying. The sight of a powerful bully of a man, otherwise normal bodied enough, stricken with such a black ache of despair through total inability to communicate thought of any kind, had filled the girl with a sort of repulsion. She had tried to talk to him, to point out positions on the chart; had given him paper and pencil and essayed to have him write. But obviously enough all this had been impossible for his brain. He had been able to do no more than scrawl meaningless lines.

So, after perhaps twenty minutes of this, Isora had left him to his own maundering devices in the gray gloom of the cabin, and had sought relief in tempest battered freedom on the quarter deck.

"AWFUL follerin' sea, ain't it?" Leadspitter shouted to her as she came and stood beside him, gazing out over that tremendous, storm lashed desolation of gray and heaving sea hills. "We gotta still keep runnin'!"

She made no answer but, schooled in every mood and tense of ocean, stood there a competent figure in spray wet oilskins, with her sou'wester knotted under her firm chin. An unwonted color glowed through the creamy richness of her hue. Composed and unafraid, unshrinkingly she watched all that storm and sea had to give, and smiled.

"If it don't take off pretty soon," opined Leadspitter, grim and dripping at the poop rail that drunkenly plunged, "if it don't ease off afore long, by Judas, we might drive far to s'uthard o' the Falklands!"

"Well, what of that?" she asked, her voice whipping away on the boister of the roaring blast. "Plenty of sea room ahead!"

"I ain't so sure o' this 'un," he answered, with a twitch of his bullet scarred cheek. "I've seen many a stouter 'un!"

"You don't mean there's any real danger of her foundering?"

He shrugged heavy shoulders, dug a hand into his oilskin pocket and produced a pipe, which he thrust between his ugly teeth. That pipe had long since been drenched out by flying spray. By no possibility could he now light it; yet through reflex action of long habit, he sucked at its gnawed stem.

Isora's poise was of carefree tranquillity. For all she seemed to care, the *China Girl* might have been a pleasure yacht, this roaring South Atlantic the most mirrorlike expanse of the Spanish Main.

"Why *not* try for the Falklands?" she presently asked. "Run in to Port Stanley, refit a little, and hold on for better weather?"

Leadspitter shook a head of positive negation.

"Can't be done! No show to bring a ship up to the wind in no such weather as this here—not a rotten old gurry tub like this, nohow. Not with a crew as half of 'em don't know the diff'rence between a brace an' a tack, even yet! As for better weather, we might wait a devil of a long time for it. It's ten months bad weather round the Horn, an' two months doubtful, savvy? But, we mebbe got a few shots in our locker, yet. We'll round old Cape Stiff yet, an' not beholding to nobody! We'll just keep runnin' awhile yet."

Then he fell silent, thinking.

"Might try for the Falklands, at that," he pondered.

"Only—"

The same old dilemma gripped and squeezed him. To make port anywhere might bring medical help for Bohannon. It would probably, yes, almost certainly, mean that the girl would go ashore, taking her property with her, to wait for passage northward on any tramp or whaler that might offer.

And that would mean Leadspitter's losing the money for which his heart and soul feverishly lusted. If the *China Girl* were to head for any port Isora would first have to be disposed of without delay. But how, in this crisis, could she be spared? Only her seamanship and

mathematics stood between Leadspitter and almost certain catastrophe. Once Isora gone, disaster would impend. In his venomously brooding heart Leadspitter cursed.

"No!" he suddenly broke out. "We'll weather through, some way another. Once this lulls, we'll get her round to the west'ard again. Round the Horn is how my orders reads, an' round the Horn we're goin'. But—"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothin'!"

VENOMOUSLY brooding and astare, he held silence. How in the name of all demons was he going to get rid of Isora and Bohannon, the two beings who stood directly across his path? The two obstacles between him and the wealth he lusted for?

Something seemed to whisper:

"Take 'em one at a time, anyhow! Dispose of one first. That'll be half the battle. You'll find some way to settle with the other. One at a time!"

"By God," he thought, "if I had the backbone of a louse, I'd polish off the Old Man, anyhow. After that—well, after that, I reckon I can get clear o' *her!*"

Isora asked a question. He did not answer, did not even hear. Nor for the rest of that watch did he speak again. Murder, to be done at once, was brooding in his heart and festering there. A kind of sick eagerness had gripped him. His mouth felt dry. Unwonted pulses hammered in his temples. The pipestem nearly broke under the crushing tension of his teeth.

Kill! Yes, he would kill! Why wait for tomorrow, even? Why not do it today? *One* problem at all events would be solved, one obstacle heaved from his road.

He would kill!

Of a sudden, the eight bells that ended the watch sounded with harsh and metallic clangors. Those clangors shivered through his soul. They meant that now he was free to go below, that the hour, the very minute of murder was at hand.

His voice shook a little, for all his hardness, as he shouted to the watch struggling aft:

"Relieve the wheel! The rest o' ye stand by for a call!" To Isora he added, "You take on now, sir. Keep her dead afore it an' watch the steerin'."

"All right," Isora tersely answered. "All right, sir."

"Reckon I'll go below."

"Very well, sir!"

"Gimme a call, if you think I'm needed."

Untroubled by all the wild turmoil of the elements, she cast a competent glance at sea and sky and reefed canvas.

"I can handle her all right as she is, sir. But I'll call you if anything happens. I can handle her, though."

"Yes," thought Leadspitter poisonously, "an', by the jumpin' Judas, I can handle you! When the time comes—when I get the proper chanst, now, I can handle *you*."

CHAPTER XIV

THE KILL

DOWN in the cabin, now deserted, Leadspitter saw that which vastly quickened his determination to slay. He beheld a ruck of charts strewn over the table, some upside down, some rolled and others flat, one or two even torn.

"Burn me if that ain't some more o' that old fooley's work!" he exclaimed with the vehemence of a murderous hate.

Right well he knew Isora would never have left charts like that. Versed in ship ways, she never would have even thought of getting out charts without having first asked his permission. After using, she would invariably have put them away all trim and tidy. Evidence stood conclusive against the Old Man.

"Some more o' his hell fired foolishness! I'm goin' to put an end to this, s'help me!"

A moment Leadspitter stood looking with alert and evil eyes, hip braced against the table as the vessel plunged.

He seemed analyzing the situation, making sure all was propitious for the crime he meant to commit. His craggy face rock hard, jaw set, he peered about that dim lit place, assuring himself that none observed him.

All seemed favorable. Peter Mayes was obviously still asleep, his snores rhythmically blent with the thunderous uproar of gale and sea battering the *China Girl.* No sign appeared of old Abey Buzzard. He too, according to his somnolent habit, was probably indulging himself in slumbers as bland and toothless as those of any newborn infant. No better moment could have offered.

"Looks like the coast was clear," muttered Leadspitter, hauling off sou'wester and oilskins. "If I got the heart of a bedfly, I can do the trick. Do it now!"

First, though, he must be perfectly sure about old Abey. He crossed the swaying, bucking floor and gently opened the door of the steward's room. Right! Buzzard, he saw, was lying in his berth, flat on his back and with his mouth gummily open, dead to the world. The old fellow, gaunt, grizzled and unshaven, made a spectacle unlovely enough, but now to Leadspitter welcome. Abey's chronic sleepiness now had for him become a blessing indeed.

Noiselessly Leadspitter closed the door and went aft to his own cabin, the one whence he had ousted Bohannon. He entered, only to stop short with a gulped oath.

"What the hell, now?" he mouthed, and for a second remained blankly staring.

The sight that met his narrowed gaze poured oil on his fires of hate. There at the desk, the desk that had been Bohannon's and that Leadspitter now claimed for his own, none other than Bohannon himself was sitting. The Old Man, bandaged of head and with but one eye exposed, had the desk drawer open, and with a shaking, unsteady hand was pawing the papers there.

"For God's sake, if that ain't somethin', now!" Leadspitter ejaculated. "What the devil you up to, anyhow? Judas Priest! I seem to ha' come just in the heft o' the party, ain't I? Here, you, lay off that!"

BOHANNON turned his one eye fair on Leadspitter; and in that eye flamed hate, rage, defiance. He tried to stammer some kind of protest, of malediction; but only a wordless and grotesque yammering escaped his convulsed throat.

"Of all the nervy tricks!" Leadspitter flung at him.

He entered the cabin, closed the door and stood glowering at the Old Man. Bohannon returned the look with interest. Though he could not speak, he could understand, think, hate. The deadly enmity between these two lay like a tangible thing that sundered them yet bound them each to each.

"Here, you swab! Get up out o' that! Get up, stand clear o' my desk there, you son of a pup!"

Bohannon vented a sort of animal-like roar as Leadspitter seized him by the shoulder and dragged him fron the desk. He struggled to his feet. With face empurpled, mouth asnarl, he let fly a powerful fist.

The blow, delivered with surprising power, sent Leadspitter staggering. It caught him just as the ship bucked, toppled him reeling backward over a stool, landed him a bit dazed with head and shoulders in the corner by the berth.

As he struggled up, belching curses, his hand caught a leg of the stool. That hand tightened, held; and with the stool he struck. Bohannon flung up a warding arm, but just a split second too late. The whirling stool bashed the Old Man's bandaged head. Something dully crunched. Grunting, pole axed, Bohannon dropped. He fell oddly contorted. A twitch or two rippled his muscles. Then he lay still.

Leadspitter flung down the stool, and with cold implacability stood staring. His pulse was pounding a bit, but no trace of pity stirred it; neither regret for this infamy nor dread of consequences. By the vague light of the cabin port, a

spray dashed glimmer, he looked cynically at Bohannon and knew the Old Man was dead. Knew that from this source, at all events, no further trouble or opposition ever could arise. Then he prodded the corpse with his sea boot. Lax as putty, it gave a little, and sagged back.

"You old dog's whelp!" he mouthed, as his eyes fed hatefully on the fallen enemy. "That's *one*, anyhow!"

Exultation stabbed him like a knife. A tiny doubt, however, whispered at his ear. He shot the bolt of the cabin door, knelt, rolled the body on its broad back. Stooping still lower, he laid an ear to the breast.

Not a sound. No throb, no quiver.

"Fine!" judged Leadspitter, wolfishly licking his lips. "I wish, though—I wish, by God, he was into his own cabin, an' not here."

SENSING a tingle of anxiety, he began wondering how he should contrive to get the Old Man back to his cabin. It would never do to have the body found here. Even though no blood tinged the bandages, even though Leadspitter could claim Bohannon had died of natural causes, or—on a pinch, could set up a plea of self-defense—the consequences of discovery might prove fatal. Bohannon must at all hazards be returned to his own cabin, and at once.

With shoulders hunched, red hair rucked up, Leadspitter tried to think. Thinking was not Leadspitter's long suit. Vaguely he realized that things had fallen pat to his hand. He had, at all events, not murdered in cold blood. The Old Man had struck the first blow. That fact gave Leadspitter some colorable hint of self-justification. Few men living are too base to quest such.

"He hit me first, that's what he done!" muttered Leadspitter. "I only give him what was comin' to him, by Judas Priest! If one chance wallop done his business, is that my bloomin' fault?"

Through the dregs of his pondering, ever more insistently whispered the voice of self-preservation:

"Never mind that! Get him out of here, quick!"

Motivated now only by a considerable and waxing uneasiness, Leadspitter slid back the bolt of the door, opened it a crack, and, holding to the jamb as the ship plunged, peeped out into the main cabin.

All clear! No one was visible. Peter Mayes' snoring still troubled the dim air; old Abey Buzzard's door still remained fast.

"A-1," Leadspitter thought, and turned back to the body. He stooped, grappled the Old Man, found him astonishingly heavy. Bohannon weighed no less than two hundred and ten. The dead heft of him, the complete and sagging nullity of all response, seemed to double that. For all Leadspitter's gorilla strength, sweat pricked on his forehead as he heaved the body up and staggered with it through the door.

He failed to raise it completely. The feet dragged. Straining under his burden, accentuated by the sick and erratic swoops of the *China Girl*, Leadspitter feighted the body to the Old Man's door. A sudden break in Peter Mayes' snoring shot terror to Leadspitter's heart. But he struggled on. Retreat now was impossible. Panting, sweating, he reached the door.

It was a task for Hercules, to hold the body and at the same time open that door, but Leadspitter accomplished it. He dared not lay the corpse down. A moment of tense fear, and the door swung. Leadspitter hauled the body through, and with a strained knee forced the door shut. Another tug, a heave, and he tumbled the Old Man into his berth.

"Whew!" breathed Leadspitter, and smeared his forehead with a paw that shook.

Then, delaying not—each second now might be golden—he somewhat composed the body. He rolled it on its right side, face to the bulkhead, once more assured himself the bandages showed no blood, and stood back to survey his work.

"I'll be tarred," thought he, "if I see

how anybody can tell he didn't slip his wind natural-like. Ain't no way nobody can hook *me* up to this an' claim *I* killed the old son of a one!"

With which self-comfort and a final look at the body, Leadspitter left the cabin quietly, securely closed the door, and returned to his own quarters.

FORESPENT with emotion—for even he was capable of it, and Bohannon was the first man he had ever really killed without serious combat—he slumped down in the chair at his desk.

Rum. All at once he wanted rum and lots of it. He turned to the medicine chest, got down a square face and poured a full tumbler. This he gulped at a breath. Slopping out another tumbler, he half finished that too.

"Ah, that's better now!"

And with the first fingerings of warm Dutch courage through his blood, the situation began to look more rosy. There could develop, after all, no evidence against him. And as for Bohannon, his enemy, was he not dead?

"Fine, by the jumpin' Judas H!" Leadspitter affirmed, and finished the rest of the liquor.

Then it occurred to him that the disordered state of his cabin might be evidence, and without delay he began bringing the place to rights. He set the stool in its accustomed place, put away the charts, brought all to order. Better and better still.

Another thought won to his brain, already slightly fuddled with the fumes of alcohol:

"What the devil an' all was the Old Man after, in the desk? What was he tryin' to locate, that's what I'd like to know!"

Maybe, Leadspitter pondered, Bohannon had thought the keys of the safe had been put there. In that event, the captain had perhaps been trying once more to get his hands on Isora's treasure. This reflection tightened Leadspitter's mouth and clenched his fist.

"But he didn't get away with it, did he?" the mate exulted. "He got hove on his beam ends, all right, afore he done it! I learned him to try an' steal my honest share from me, eh, what?"

Something about this theory, however, did not satisfy Leadspitter. Some blurred intuition seemed to whisper, "No, not the keys—something else!"

Leadspitter with an oath jerked open the desk drawer.

"I'll damn' soon find out for myself!"

He began searching the drawer.

THIS time nothing escaped him. Charts, papers, everything, one by one he took them out, laid them in his bunk. Narrowly he scrutinized them by the gray glimmer through the port. Toward the end of his investigation he came upon a folded newspaper. Inside it something lay.

"Well, what's this?"

With thick and clumsy fingers he undid the newspaper, discovering a brown manila envelope. Something was written on it, in the Old Man's familiar and staggering script. Leadspitter's brows contracted as he studied this inscription, turning the envelope so that the ghostly storm light should fall upon it.

"'Private Papers!'" he quoted. "Huh!"

Then, in the upper left corner, he read an imprint: "Jason Mellish, 26A South Street, New York City." His fingers sensed a fat and yielding quality of the contents, that allured.

"Feels like money to me!"

He ripped the envelope and sat there, staring. His jaw gaped. He stammered a blasphemy.

For a moment the dull richness of the yellow backs half paralyzed him. He blinked, as at some dazzling unreality, his brain a-spin with alcohol and greed; and the hand that gripped the bills commenced to tremble.

"Money, s'help me—thick money!"

All at once in a very fever of avarice he fell to counting the money. At the end—

"For God's sake, twenty thousand dollars!"

The discovery dizzied and confused him. He tried to think, to analyze. Where could Bohannon get twenty thousand dollars? How could this be true?

"Hell!" he suddenly exclaimed. "It's only part o' the girl's cash. This here ain't no new money!"

Still, it might be. Through some chance, dazzlingly fortunate to Leadspitter, might not the Old Man have possessed this wealth of his own? A burning eagerness to know swept over him. He flung the money down, dredged up his keys and knelt before the safe, opened it, took out the metal box containing Isora's property.

This he tore open, spread the contents on the desk, feverishly counted the cash. The bonds he thrust aside. Under no circumstances did Leadspitter want those. Too much trouble and danger in bonds. Cash. Cash was all that mattered now.

His count revealed the original hundred and eighty thousand. Not a dollar was missing. Blinking, swallowing hard, he tried to realize the truth. The liquor in his brain blurred fine details, yet for all that the truth stood out keen; the twenty thousand was Bohannon's very own.

"An' that—that, an' this here," Leadspitter stammered, "makes a couple o' hundred thousand, cash money. Two hundred thousand is what it tots up to, s'help me!"

Then a kind of golden ecstasy possessed his soul, a glow and joyance and hot exultation that all his years of life had never known. He crumpled the bills with harsh, rude fingers, kneaded them, pawed them over, laughed and pawed again.

"Two hundred thousand, an' all mine, holy Lord, *all mine!*"

This mood passed. Caution won a hearing. The money was all his, yes, *if—!* Again into the picture obtruded the prime necessity for Isora's death. Only one of the two obstacles had been removed. Another still remained.

"She'll get hers, though, all right!" Leadspitter growled. "The high dive is what she'll have, quick as I can get along without her. That's what she will, by Judas Priest!"

This sobered him, brought him once more envisaging realities. The twenty thousand, that was safe enough. That, at all events, was his, irrevocably his. The rest, though, still remained to earn.

"But I'll earn it, all right!" Leadspitter promised himself with a snarling grin. "It's good as mine, a'ready. An' not a cent of any of it—his or hers—won't have to be divided with nobody. It's all mine, every nickel, every copper—that's what it is. Things is sure all shipshape with me now. It's all fair sailin', no mistake!"

TO BE CONTINUED

SOURDOUGH'S SACRIFICE

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

"Dicing with Death for a grubstake,
Facing the future alone . . ."

THERE was a bit of verse by Pat O'Cotter that Dad Middleton liked to repeat to himself on occasion. He invariably selected a portion that fitted his peculiar need of the moment. As his mind leaped back through the years, the grizzled face became serious, the bearded lips moved:

"A home, a wife and a family;
A job on the great outside—
But he heard the call of Alaska
And left them—unsatisfied!"

How swiftly the years had passed since he had left that family for Alaska! What tremendous toll in strength the North had taken. Fording glacier streams had stiffened his joints; facing the glare of sun drenched snow or the driving ice particles of the blizzard had dimmed his eyes; and his back was bent from too many packs; his hands scarred from contact with sharp rocks and the wounds of his calling; his nails were broken and his stomach weak from eating the food of tin cans so many years. Dad looked down upon the rude table groaning with its weight of gold—one hundred thousand dollars in moosehide pokes. Sagely he whispered:

"God! But how true!

"Winters of long hungry hardship,
Summers of pest ridden heat—
Dicing with death for a grubstake,
Risking his life for meat.
Scorning the letters recalling;
Forgetting the friends he had known,
Turning his back on the outside—
Facing the future alone."

Yes! God's truth, all of it! He had been hungry in winter, pest ridden in summer, and when the weather was unusually cold he limped—his right ankle had been broken in a fall when he had

climbed a mountain for meat. And the friends of twenty and thirty years ago! What of them? He had forgotten and been forgotten! Then, there were the lonely winters when his heart had cried for the companionship of a woman. Native girls—one man women, as there are one man dogs, who found happiness in serving their lord—would have come at his word. But this part of O'Cotter's verse was not true:

> "A cabin, a squaw and a fishwheel,
> A bend in the river's flow—
> A couple of sad eyed halfbreeds;
> He stayed there—a sourdough."

He had a cabin in the bend of the river's flow and the fishwheel, but neither squaw nor sad eyed breeds. The memory of his wife, Bess, and the kids, Jack and Mary, proved a staff on which he leaned in moments of weakness.

How swift the passage of time! The thought again came to him. The mountains and streams had not changed, so he had forgotten how time passes. He hardly remembered growing older. But Bess had died three years ago; Jack and Mary were married. And for Bess, Jack and Mary he had exiled himself, driven by the hope of striking pay that they might have the comforts and education he had been denied. To labor with his hands had been his heritage. He wanted something more for his children than a day laborer could give. And he had found it.

Others had searched the length and breadth of the North and been denied, but he had remained in one spot, seeking the pay streak he knew existed—and he had found it! One hundred thousand dollars in two months' time he had taken from the lode. But hold! This was not the truth, for he had spent twenty years in seeking it.

HE PLACED shavings and matches on the stove, convenient for any one who might stop at the cabin, then carried his pokes of gold to the canoe. He carefully stowed his sleeping bag, rifle and other belongings, so much a part of his life; then he closed, but did not lock, the cabin door. There was a place for Fox, his malemute lead dog in the bow.

As he was about to shove off, a native girl, with a trace of white in her veins, ran down to the bank. She was lithe, young, colorful. There was none prettier along five hundred miles of river; bold she might be in her efforts to win a white man, yet intriguingly shy. "Lou" the trappers called her, and twice she had offered to care for Dad Middleton's cabin for her food and clothing. Besides her labor she had promised loyalty. But Dad had smiled and gently refused. Rather wistfully she watched the current bear him away. Presently he passed the fishwheel and disappeared behind the bend in the river's flow.

As Dad shot the rapids his mind bridged the years, step by step. Fur trapped in the winter and an occasional poke of gold panned in the summer had fed, clothed and educated the children, often at great cost to himself. Mary had been nicely "finished" at some Eastern school, and he heard she had taken a polish. Jack had gone to military academy for three years and finished at a well known law school. The children had profited, not suffered by his absence in the North.

The pangs when he thought of the youngsters growing up beyond his eyes were cruelly sharp and he bore them alone in winter's darkness. And yet he was always sure next year would see him out of the country with the big strike behind him; so he lingered on. Time sped.

Dad twisted the paddle and forced the craft into smooth waters. It reminded him of life—rapids, rocks, danger, then a measure of ease for a time. The experience—perhaps it was the sacrifice—had mellowed him. He was like fine old wine. The wrinkles on his face added to the softness; his smile was sweet, the twinkle in his faded eyes merry.

"I aim to have a right good time with the kids," he frequently told himself. "Yep, a right good time! Fifty thousand for each will put 'em on their feet. I can

sort of live with one or the other and putter round, gardening. She was sure one long, tough trail, but I've got the world by the tail and a downhill pull!"

HE SENT them a radiogram and, when the Alaskan liner slipped easily into her berth, Dad eagerly searched the sea of faces for the faces of his own. The instinctive sense that appraising eyes were weighing him gave Dad his first hint. He shifted his own vision, then timidly waved at a young couple standing somewhat apart. So this was their Dad and these were his children.

They were waiting at the gangway, where Mary kissed him rather dutifully, then gave him a swift second glance that it was well he did not see. He was looking at Jack at the time, weighing him as men of the North weigh men. In turn, Jack was weighing his father, as men of the cities weigh men. How handsome Jack was in his perfectly fitting clothes, and yet . . . As men put aside a traitorous thought, so Dad Middleton banished disapproval from his mind. This was his son, the finest man in the land.

It was arranged that he stay at Jack's house the first week. His room was finer than anything he had seen and the greeting of Jack's wife was friendly enough. There were guests at dinner that evening and Alice, Jack's wife, worried a lot. Of course Dad must sit with the family, but this was to be a spiffy meal and somehow Dad and his broken fingernails would not fit in. He said little, answering the conventional questions and venturing a few sly jokes which brought forth polite laughter and convinced Dad that his humor was not appreciated.

When he finished the meal, Dad tilted back in his chair and taking the pocket knife that had skinned many a moose, proceeded to whittle a match into a toothpick. He picked his teeth, as he had done for a lifetime, and picked them in a manner that was once fashionable. Alice shuddered and Jack wondered what he should say about it later. That night they talked it over and decided to ship him over to Mary's before the next affair. It was agreed that Mary might be able to handle him. Mary was that way.

Mary hurried Dad down to a tailor's for dinner clothes and, while he was still dizzy from the tailor's deft work, Mary rushed him to a barber shop where he was given the works. The manicurist almost admitted defeat but agreed that in three months' time she might make his nails fairly presentable. Mary turned thumbs down on the toothpick climax of each meal.

And through it all Dad smiled gently and did his best to please. He worked around in his children's gardens and spent hours with Fox, his old lead dog, who really understood him.

Dad tried to please them. He had spent a lifetime in an effort to please and with one hundred thousand dollars in good bonds he did not propose to quit now.

Nor did he express his opinion on the new order of things until the night of Mary's dinner dance. He arrived home from a visit downtown at one o'clock and the party was going strong. On the threshold he stopped dead in his tracks. Dawson, Fairbanks and Nome had seen nothing like it. Jack with another man's wife on his knees, sipping from a loving cup. And Mary, his Mary, drunk. There is a politer term for the condition, but Dad did not use it.

> "Winters of long hungry hardship;
> Summers of pest ridden heat . . .'

"AND FOR this!" He shook his head. "And I gave my best years for this."

The high spots of his life flashed before his eyes swifter than the highest speed camera could have projected them. Each stood clear and sharp. The time he had half frozen, wedged in a glacier crevasse; a winter day when he had crawled from an overflow and dragged for a mile the ice blocks that were his legs; the agony of

snow blindness softened by the picture of his children at their mother's knee; the mauling a dying bear had given him. All for this.

These creatures looked down on his crude ways, he knew. God! The long winter nights when his very soul cried out for feminine companionship and he had stifled the cry; when the soft pad of an ugly squaw's moccasins would have been music. When days passed without human voice and only the companionship of his dogs had kept him from going mad —that and the picture of Bess and the kids.

He glanced about. Some were openly embracing; others were carrying on in partial seclusion. He drew himself up, and those not too drunk felt his scorn. In the old days men could carry their liquor; only the weaklings got drunk. These men and these women were drunk and the *finish* the women had received at some schools was thin veneer indeed.

And how little women really knew of what held men—youth and freshness. A priceless possession they were squandering for rotten hootch and too many cigarets; aging themselves because it was the fashion; growing thin and hollow chested; hectic wrecks that even paint and powder failed to freshen.

The room had grown strangely silent. In Jack and Mary's crowd it had been whispered that their father was a "character", and therefore peculiar, but he had money. This was sufficient for them to overlook everything.

He stalked across the room to his daughter; blind fury had gripped him. He jerked the cigaret from her mouth and slapped her with his open hand.

"You—" he choked back the epithet.

Jack leaped between his sister and father; his fists were clenched.

"Father—before our friends—" he panted.

"Friends?" Middleton sneered. "This scum, your friends! God! I've seen enough in two minutes to know a lousy Siwash squaw out of wedlock will give more loyalty to her man than some of these women give their husbands."

During his rage something within had seemed to grow tighter and tighter. Suddenly it snapped. What was wrong with him? The faces in the room were growing distorted.

"My dream of—my kids!" he cried. "Why couldn't I have kept it?"

The lights in the room grew dim before his eyes, then utter blackness.

DAD MIDDLETON was dying. The doctor said so. It was something medicine could not touch; very difficult to explain. The doctor likened it, somewhat, to transplanting a tree long rooted to a certain soil. That, and something else, the shattering of a dream, perhaps. He apologized to his cold eyed daughter when she visited him. Jack Middleton looked in once a day, for the sake of appearance, then spent much of his time explaining that his father had missed too many boats, he guessed. Those familiar with Alaskan terms knew he meant the old man had remained in Alaska too long and was mildly insane from solitude and hardship.

There was a sinking spell and a rally, then Buck Shedd, hearing of Dad's plight, called to visit him. Buck was an old-timer himself who spent his winters outside, courting various widows in the hope of finding one who would love him enough to winter in the North.

"They say I'm dying," Dad muttered, eying Buck sharply. "I might as well be, so far as the kids are concerned. Well, I done my duty by 'em, and I might as well die—there's nothing left here for me."

"The poet says it ain't the gold so much as the gettin' it," Buck reminded him. "Even so, why not die? I heard what happened at the party."

"Yes, why not?" Dad agreed.

"I'll help you, old-timer—help you die, and help bury you. Could you drag yourself out the window and make it to the canal?"

"I guess I could. It ain't far! Give me three days to get ready. I'd better make a will!"

"Might as well. Leave the money to the kids, eh?"

"Yeah. They'll drink 'emselves to death." He shook his head sadly. "It don't make no difference to the world. Somebody better will take their place —my kids!" He sharply caught his breath. "How about early Saturday morning?"

"Good!"

DAD MIDDLETON'S bed was empty. The nurse spread the alarm. His clothing was missing, too. A small boy had seen him emerge from the rear of the hospital; a gasoline station attendant had seen a man answering his description slowly making his way toward the canal; and the bridge tender had seen such a man standing on the bank, watching the water. About that time a steamer had passed through and when he looked again the old man was gone, but a hat was floating on the surface. It might have blown off as there was a wind, but . . .

The newspapers carried the story that evening; a search was being made and the canal dragged.

At that same hour the remains of Dad Middleton were aboard the steamer Aleutian. He was tired; but his room mate, Buck Shedd, noticed that his breathing was steady. Ever since he had picked Dad up in a car at the agreed place, the canal bank; they had been on the go. Now Dad was paying for it.

"Come on out," Buck suggested on the third day. "Snow's getting down lower and it's beginning to look like our country."

Dad walked the deck some. He walked it more the next day and by the time they crossed the Gulf he was almost himself. He was trying to forget the dark days; a true stampeder, he was inclined to see the future ahead rather than the darkness behind.

THEY loafed around Mel Horner's place at Seward for awhile, then Dad took the train for the interior. Old Fox was with him; but Dad bought several MacKenzie River huskies to make up a team, loaded it with grub and struck off for the river country.

The Northern Lights were blazing; there was frost in the air; from beneath the sled runners came the old familiar whine of steel against snow and ice. Many night camps, with the dogs sleeping with tails over noses, followed; many days when the sun peered briefly above the Southern rim of the world and gave forth no heat at all. Then—and his heart quickened—his cabin just beyond the bend in the river's flow. The fish-wheel had been removed by some thoughtful person, the native girl Lou, perhaps.

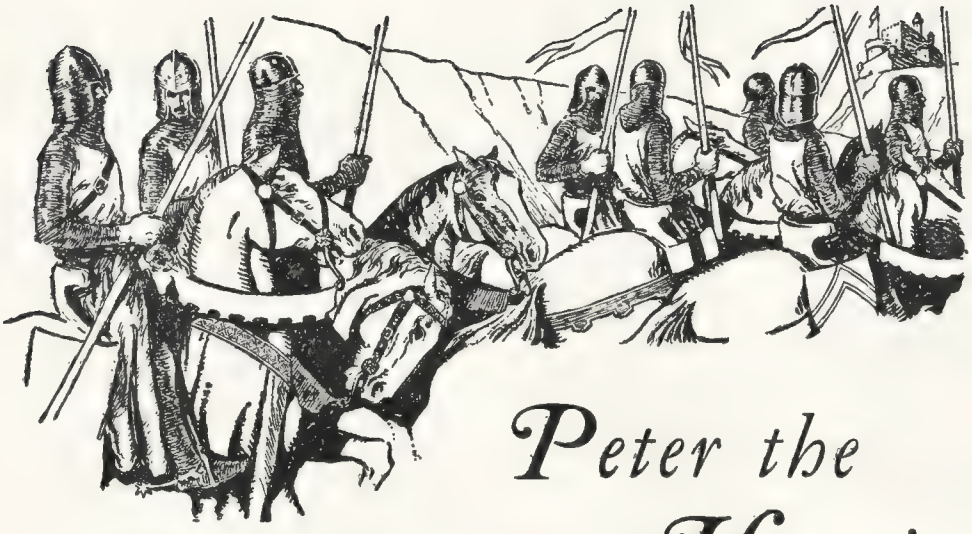
He hesitated, then turned aside to another cabin from which smoke trailed lazily in the frosty air. He kicked the Indian dogs away from his steaming team and opened the door. A squaw grinned; Lou looked up shyly. Middleton smiled briefly and looked at Lou.

"Put on your parka and come along," he said.

The girl flushed beneath her bronzed skin and smiled; her dark eyes flashed at him curiously, then were lowered. She pulled on a parka of caribou skin with wolverine skin facing and swung in behind him. She was happy. She had attained the goal of every native girl in whose blood runs the white strain—a white man.

At the door of his cabin he stopped and looked behind him. His jaw set and he shrugged his shoulders, then the door swung open and the girl entered. Dad Middleton closed the door behind him. Presently smoke came from the chimney, a light flickered against the frosty window, the odor of frying bacon came from a crack in the door.

Dad Middleton was dead.



Peter the Hermit

"HO!" CRIED the Pope, with his scarlet robes a-blowing,
Crimson robes spinning past his golden jeweled head.
"You'll muster your bright blades, for men must be knowing
That it's Cross against Crescent or we'll all be dead!"
(All Christendom was thinking what the Pope had said!)

Tall Pope Urban had a voice like a peasant
While battering at Clermont the French nobles' ears;
He pointed them the highway leading to the Crescent,
And called on their honor and bolstered up their fears.
(And said he'd go himself if he'd had fewer years!)

The sun glanced their armor and turned against their spears,
Vests made of beaten gold and robes like silver fur.
"Go!" cried the old Pope, and his cheeks were wet with tears,
"Turn back the Infidels and bring the Sepulcher!"
(The nobles kissed his ring and blessed the name of Her.)

A Narrative Poem of the Crusades

By DON FARRAN

Decorations by F. THORNBURGH

Leon to Byzantine, over all Christendom,
The nobles took the crying of the tall Pope's grace.
"God wills it!" went the word, and like a singing drum:
"Old Constantinople shall be our meeting place!"
(One hundred thousand good men with long-sword and mace!)

"Cross against Infidel!" were Pope Urban's orders,
So His Highness told them, so it would be done!
On to Jerusalem, across Mohammed's borders,
And burn the rising Crescent in the Christian Sun!
(And bring the Holy Sepulcher that they had won!)

They polished their armor and gathered their horses,
And vassals made them spear shafts for strong arms to swing;
While down through the long halls they lolled with their forces,
Talking and muttering of what they'd do in Spring.
(With ruddy wines purling and ancient songs to sing.)

"PETER the Hermit" was name the small boys gave him,
Tagging at his robe's hem everywhere he went;
A wild eyed fanatic as strong as an oak limb,
And his voice held the ringing words that angels sent!
(Though his broad shoulders stooped and his dark back was bent.)

"They'll ride their she-horses with small feet made of steel!"
So Peter the Hermit screamed, underneath the trees—
"They'll go with their chain mail and a sharp roweled heel
I'll see Jerusalem a-crawling on my knees!"
(And the hills knew the Hermit had heard the Pope's pleas.)

"Sire," said the Hermit to Walter the Penniless,
Fingering his crucifix, muttering a prayer,
"Go rouse the peasants with fire and with bitterness,
And bring to me a sharp blade fighting men should wear!
("Let the men of Antioch taste the steel we wear!")

In from their hovels he gathered them at dawning,
Coming with a chanting and a rumbling song;
And Walter the Penniless cursed them for yawning
As they plodded in a dusty line six miles long.
(While the gaunt Hermit preached and beat his brazen gong.)

Black John had left with his iron forge a-cooling,
And hurried with a thin blade swinging at his side;
A young half-wit paused in his fool's vacant drooling
And pattered down the road while his old mother cried.
(Going to the Holy Shrine where their Christ had died!)

The mists of the valley were shot through with sunrise,
And dank, wavering fogs seemed to hold them in thrall;
Men with their singing hearts and eyes of dull surprise—
"God wills it! God wills it! O, will ye hear the call?"
(While banners and Crimson Cross hung over it all.)

THUMP of their marching feet like clash of a tourney—
(But what of the dear ones they're leaving far behind?)
"God will surely watch them, for God wills we journey!"
Heavy clouds of pale dust come drifting down the wind.
("Go!" had Pope Urban said, "Our Christian God is kind!")

And down through the flickering blue of the valley,
Where the Danube flows through the hills of shadowed stone,
The haggard old Hermit flayed his Scriptured rally,
And told them if they left him he'd press on alone!
(He mocked them for their weakness, in Pope Urban's tone.)

Suns came against the sky and dark birds went flying,
And night huddled down on them when daylight was gone;
The miles fell behind them, with men dead and dying,
But forever bent Peter the Hermit led on.
(And bones dragged on wearily where there had been brawn.)

"They're coming behind us with their blue swords gleaming,
Nobles with their stinking souls, and all the high-born!"
The silver shields echoed the ragged knight's screaming,
"They come to rape the City of the Golden Horn!
("To steal the wealth and riches of the Golden Horn!")

And so did they come with their banners a-flying,
Trappings spun of gold threads and crimson crosses hung;
Down through the valleys where peasants lay a-dying,
Hearing the old war songs Pope Urban's nobles sung.
(But war songs drown in curses from a peasant's tongue!)

"Great God!" cried gaunt Peter, as he paused there to pray,
"We sought the Holy Sepulcher, but now come these . . .
Dead are all my peasants, but spare *me* till the day
I see Jerusalem upon my bended knees!
("City of my Fathers upon my bended knees!")

For tireless centuries the Christian nobles swept
Down upon the Crescent with all their mighty host;
And, far on in the van of them, a dim figure crept—
The gaunt, broken shadow of the Hermit's thin ghost!
(*There, near Jerusalem, they found his kneeling ghost!*)

QUALITY

A Story of the Road Builders

By GUTHRIE BROWN

"WHERE is this Buck Cañon Road?"

The new superintendent of the Quintere mine was going over the books. Sibley, the chief clerk, answered.

"It is about fifteen miles south of here."

"Why is the mine building it?"

"It's the new road to Melrose," replied Sibley. "You see, Mr. Archer, the company is opening up new claims all through this country. We've got to get a truck road out of here if we continue to compete with other mines."

"This is to be a truck road?"

"And a first class one," Sibley assured him. "No grade over nine per cent. and most of it seven. Besides, it will cut twelve miles off the trip to the railroad."

Archer bent his thin face with its piercing eyes over the ledger.

"Here's last month's itemized sheet for the Buck Cañon road," Sibley went on. "You can see where every penny went."

Archer scrutinized the sheet carefully and nodded.

"I would say that was rather low cost for mountain road building."

Sibley smiled. He had hoped that Archer would get the point. Before the arrival of the new superintendent, the chief clerk had felt dubious about the ability of an Eastern man to handle a purely Western enterprise. But he had been happily surprised at the efficient manner in which Archer had grasped details and penetrated to weakness or waste in the organization.

"You're just right it's low," he answered. "The Quintere mine was more than lucky to get the man it has for its road work. The same man holds the freight contract."

"Ah!" Archer seemed suddenly interested. "He owns the teams and wagons, I suppose, and hires drivers?"

"Mostly, yes. But he often gives work to ranchers, too, when their teams are idle, especially in the winter."

Archer was about to speak again when a man entered the office, glanced at Archer and started to withdraw.

"What is it, Cody?" asked Sibley. "Come right on in. Meet the new superintendent, Mr. Archer."

The stooped, grizzled man called Cody nodded quietly and seemed about to extend his hand, but reconsidered. He handed Sibley a piece of paper scrawled with lead pencil.

"John said you had some cash of his here in the safe."

Sibley glanced at the paper and opened the safe. When he had counted out fifty dollars into Cody's hand, he said:

"Mr. Archer, Cody is from the road camp. He could tell you anything you might like to know."

Cody and Archer measured each other, and the former saw at once that the superintendent had no intention of discussing mine business with a middle aged workman in dirty overalls. Cody had a private smile over that and addressed himself to Sibley.

"Things are going along fine. We've been held up a little for powder, but John brought that in tonight."

"John's in, is he?"

"Yes. Pulled in about half an hour ago. I'll sure be glad," said Cody, "when he's back on the job."

"Why, don't things go all right?"

"Oh, yes! There isn't a man who doesn't play straight with John when he's gone. But we like to have him there. We're doing a nice piece of work over there, Sibley. You ought to come and see it."

Archer had turned back to the books and did not speak until Cody had gone. Then he asked—

"Is this freight contractor in camp?"

"Yes," said Sibley, "he's the—"

"I'd like to see him."

Sibley stepped to the door, looked about in the darkness of the spring night and presently called—

"Hey, there, Bill!"

"Yeah?"

"You know where John is?"

"Eating supper."

"Ask him to step down here when he's through?"

"You bet!"

"John?" questioned Archer when Sibley closed the door.

"John Bonner is his name."

"Do you—?" Archer had the appearance of a man trying to credit his senses. "A man who has the authority of this one—do his employees call him by his first name?"

Sibley stared. Was the man serious? Then the chief clerk remembered suddenly how this custom had first impressed himself, and he checked a smile.

"We all do it here, Mr. Archer," he explained. A minute later he grinned openly. "Any kid can call him John, but no man ever questions one of his orders."

Archer's disapproval did not appear to relax, but Sibley was not disturbed. Archer was a good man. He would see, give him time, and he would be a still better man after he had shed a few of his Eastern prejudices. Thus Sibley, who had been an Eastern man himself.

A LITTLE later the office door pushed open and a man walked down the room, his broad frame casting a blot of shadow along the wall. He and Sibley greeted each other and the chief clerk rose.

"John, meet the new superintendent. Mr. Archer, this is—" Sibley stopped short.

Archer was standing, an angry amazement flaming in his face that left the chief clerk perfectly dumb.

John Bonner's mouth twitched at the

corners but he stepped forward and held out his hand. Archer's pale cheeks flushed as he moved back with a slight gesture of contempt. The smile left John's eyes and he regarded the other gravely while the astounded Sibley looked from man to man. At last Archer spoke.

"Are you Bonner?"

"That is my name."

Sibley had heard that contained tone before and it didn't lessen his dismay. Archer's voice was icy.

"I was mistaken about wishing to see you. You may go."

John looked at him. It was the first time he could ever remember being dismissed. His natural impulse was to pick up the gentleman before him and throw him through the flimsy office door. However, that might complicate matters. He thought of several things to say, but the comic side of the situation struck him and none of them seemed worthwhile. He turned to Sibley and asked—

"Cody get his money?"

"Yes."

The two exchanged a casual glance to which neither gave the slightest thought of significance. But Archer caught it. He did not know, nor would he have been interested to know, that the scrawled piece of paper was Cody's order against his own wages for money that John was practically loaning him until the wages fell due. John often accommodated his men in this way and Sibley acted as cashier for him.

Archer resented the friendly understanding in the look that passed between those two, a look that seemed to ignore him and shut him out; and when John turned and walked out without another glance at Archer, the superintendent's eyes gleamed with anger. He was too keen not to appreciate the unstudied indifference of the withdrawal.

Sibley, who had acquired the Western irreverence for mere position, demanded—

"What in the deuce is the matter with you two?"

"That fellow," replied Archer, "insulted me on the road when I was coming in from Melrose."

"How?" asked the amazed Sibley. John insulting anybody!

"Does it matter?" returned Archer coldly.

Well, thought Sibley, he could get the tale from John if Archer didn't want to tell it. The superintendent, still standing, tapped a pencil nervously against the table edge. It was plain that for some reason he felt himself outraged.

"When does this man's contract expire?" he asked.

"The first of July."

"There is no provision in it for renewal, is there?"

Sibley's eyes widened.

"You don't mean to say you wouldn't renew it?"

Archer glanced at him with the glimmer of a sardonic smile.

"But, Mr. Archer—" Sibley began.

"The matter is not open to discussion." Archer used the tone with which he was accustomed to bite off argument with a subordinate.

"Well, I intend to discuss it!" Sibley kicked his chair aside and sat on the table edge close to Archer. "For some fancied wrong you're planning a petty revenge on a man who never insulted anybody in his life! He isn't built for that sort of thing. And do you know—" Sibley pounded a fist into a palm—"what that man means to this organization? He has saved us thousands of dollars on our hauling and on the building and upkeep of roads. He keeps a hundred and seventy miles of mine road and trail in first class repair with a maintenance crew of three men. Yes, I said three! He's the most efficient—"

"He's nothing but an uneducated teamster!"

Sibley laughed.

"He carries a Master's degree from the school of practical experience, and you'll find that it is the only kind that counts out here."

"He goes on the road himself!" Archer's

contempt was perfectly sincere. "Makes himself as common as—"

Sibley's laugh broke in.

"And uses a pick when need arises, or swings a mighty double jack when the rock is especially hard. Why, man alive! Labor is the measure of a man's dignity here. The stuff he is made of is what counts. It is the one thing that does count. If you'll only—"

"And since when must a general superintendent ask advice of a clerk?"

For a moment Sibley flushed. Then he smiled into Archer's arrogant eyes.

"You can't awe me, Mr. Archer. I may be only a clerk, but I've been too long looking after this confounded mine and shouldering work I'll never be paid for, to be one bit impressed. It isn't just what I think of John Bonner," he resumed. "It's what this country thinks of him. His check is gold in any country store or city bank in a radius of three hundred miles. You can believe it or not, but it was Bonner's name alone that gave the Quintere mine credit with the supply houses during the latter part of the incumbency of your predecessor."

Since, for the better part of three days, Archer had been repeatedly stumbling up against the hopeless incompetence of that predecessor, he couldn't, at the moment, lay his tongue to a handy reply. Sibley dropped the subject. He would say no more until he had seen John and learned what had happened.

"IT WASN'T much," John told him when the chief clerk wanted an explanation of the scene in the office. "I met him this side of the Lawler Hill, in two feet of mud. He was driving one of Cole's livery cars, and he thought he wasn't going to back up."

"Did you guess who he was?"

"It came to me who he must be, in the middle of the—negotiations."

Sibley's smile was appreciative.

"Did he say he wouldn't back?"

"Uh—huh. I tried to explain that one doesn't back loaded ore wagons, mud or no mud. He said I was on the left side of the road. There was no point in telling a man like that that getting out of the rut there spelled disaster for anybody."

"What did you do?" Sibley's smile had become expectant.

"I got back on my wagon and started the teams."

"You—?"

"Yes. He wanted to know what I was going to do and I told him I was going to put my leaders in his front seat."

"Oh, my Lord!" This was better than Sibley had foreseen. "What then?"

"He backed up."

John and Sibley looked at each other and grinned.

"Pretty mad?"

"Pretty mad."

"He wanted to see you tonight," guessed Sibley, "to have you fire that freighter who 'insulted' him. Oh, well—he'll be all right when he becomes acquainted with conditions and gets to know you."

John did not answer. He was not holding Archer's discourtesy against him, but he realized that the antagonism between them was more or less fundamental. Still, John had yet to see the man he couldn't work with.

Sibley did not mention the freighting contract. He didn't take Archer's threat seriously. The superintendent had too much sense, Sibley believed, to let prejudice override his judgment. He'd be glad enough to renew when the time came.

But the chief clerk reckoned without his host. Philip Archer had risen to the top of his profession by undeniable brilliance and sound ability. He came of a proud family which had never been able quite to escape an inherited disdain for the man who works with his hands. That John Bonner should take a load of ore out on the unspeakable roads of the season like the humblest of his teamsters, that he should stop his inspection of a mine trail to help a dust powdered man move a big rock, that he should groom horses and grease wagons like any stable hand—such things as these, to Archer's mind, were utterly out of character in a

man who commanded other men. As Archer saw it, Bonner did not keep his place or make other people keep theirs.

It was some time after his arrival before the superintendent found opportunity to look over the new road. He crossed the hill to the top of the cañon on horseback, to be met cordially by John, who had studiously ignored Archer's coldness and hauteur. John had made up his mind he would get along peaceably or know why.

He led Archer over several rough miles of the right of way. And Archer was impressed. No one who had the slightest knowledge of engineering problems could help being impressed by that gradual emergence of a highway upon the wild, precipitous side of a mountain.

Archer noted the clever use of the material at hand—great stones eased into the wall by alert men, who held their lives in their hands and knew it—charges of giant powder set so carefully that the shattered rock fell squarely into the roadway to form a solid foundation for the surface. It was much of it necessarily hand work, a team being of no use until the cleared track was wide enough to turn on.

John had stopped for consultation with Cody, whose business it was to clear the overhead way. Archer stood waiting and watching the work. An eighteen year old boy with a shock of red hair had stopped the swing of his pick to study the superintendent a minute before he said in a friendly voice.

"Damn' good job, ain't it?"

Archer nodded without looking around. The boy dropped his pick and stepped to Archer's side.

"Look at that right o' way," he said. "See where it's marked out? Here!" He seized Archer's arm and dragged him to the edge of the grade. "See them white rags? Straight as a ramrod, ain't she? Oh, John's the bird can build a road!"

Archer disengaged his arm, but the boy didn't notice until an acid voice cut across his absorbed contemplation of the distant flickers of white.

"Do you make a regular practice of leaving your work in this manner?"

The boy looked around in slow astonishment, then turned red to the tips of his freckled ears. He stepped back to his pick without a word. John, coming up just then, heard the question. He dropped a hand on the boy's shoulder with a quick smile that drove the hurt out of the young eyes.

Archer had not turned around. Farther down the road he remarked—

"You must have had an excellent surveyor on this job."

John did not reply to that, but a man working near by grinned. He was a keen eyed young rancher who was earning a few dollars with the road crew until his ground dried out enough to plow. Archer caught the knowing smile and looked sharply at Bonner, who was showing a teamster how to place a chain on a rock so it would come clear if the rock should start to roll.

"Who was your surveyor?" Archer asked and John answered,

"I do that end of the job myself."

"Oh! I didn't know you were a civil engineer."

"I'm not."

Archer wished to heaven he'd say a little in explanation, as any ordinary man would have done. He had the most exasperating trick of throwing the burden of conversation on the other fellow. Archer could not see that his own attitude brought about the condition.

"I suppose," he admitted with a tinge of contempt in his tone, "that one can read an instrument passably without going to college."

"I don't use an instrument," said John, and thought to himself, "Now, I have spilled the beans!"

He had, indeed. Archer leaped upon the admission.

"Do you mean to tell me that you risk thousands of dollars of the company's money on your guess about a grade?"

"I don't guess," returned John, keeping a resolute hand on his temper.

"What do you call it? You use your

eye or your instinct or something equally unreliable, don't you?"

"John uses his common sense."

It was the young rancher, leaning on his shovel handle and looking at Archer with quizzical interest. The superintendent was so taken by surprise at such temerity from a mere workman that he was powerless to interrupt.

"Which," continued the young man, "is a rare commodity, when you come right down to it. General superintendents really ought to have it."

Archer was literally dumfounded by what was to him an incredible insolence. He tried to stare down the culprit, but the young Westerner continued to look at him much as a robin regards a very large worm. He started to speak again, but thought better of it, to John's vast relief. He turned away and began shoveling broken rock into a hole. John got Archer out of that vicinity.

"How long," the superintendent asked when they were on their way back up the grade, "will it take to finish this?"

"Another two seasons, I think," replied John.

"Put on a big crew of men and rush it."

"That is not practical, Mr. Archer, until we are off the mountainside. Too many men in such a narrow working space get in each other's way and waste time and money."

"You could stretch them out a mile farther, at least."

John looked at him.

"And have them walk back and forth to camp, on their own time?"

"Certainly."

John stopped talking. He always did when the salient points of a position had been covered. He was a sad disappointment to men hunting argument. Archer was angry at his silence. What was the fellow thinking, anyhow?

Fate seized this unpropitious moment to let a rock slip from Cody's hands. It bounded down the bank and past Archer, barely brushing him but knocking him flat. John sprang to his aid, but Archer shoved aside his hand and got up, trembling with anger.

A scared, white face peered down at them.

"My God, John! I didn't know there was a soul around. I might have killed you!"

"It's all right, Cody. No harm done. I should have hailed you."

"No harm!" Archer's rage did not explode, but seemed to lick forth like a tongue of flame. "Do you condone such carelessness? Are all your employees possessed of smart Aleck tongues and butter fingers? You can dismiss this man! He's a menace to the lives of other people."

Cody's face turned a shade whiter, but John walked on without replying. When they were out of Cody's hearing, he stopped and faced Archer.

"You don't realize what you are saying when you make such remarks or give such orders. Any one may have an accident. Cody is a first class man. Besides, this job not only means his bread and butter to him but a chance to pay off a little of the debt he had to contract last winter when his whole family went through a siege with diphtheria. Also, the fault was mine for not calling to him."

"I don't care to have any discussion over it," answered Archer coldly. It did not occur to him that John might not carry out his order.

That night, Cody, trying not to look worried, asked under the clatter of the supper table,

"Will you have to let me go, John?"

"Whenever I go, Cody," replied John with the smile that set the final seal upon men's devotion to him.

ARCHER had an idea how scant would be any sympathy he might receive from Sibley, but he had to spill over to somebody. Sibley met his ironic comment upon Bonner as a surveyor by dragging forth an old ledger and running a lean forefinger under certain items in the maintenance account.

"Brought over from the road account,"

he explained. "Here—surveyor—$267. That was for just eighteen miles, the same boulevard you came in over from the river up. Here's another—surveyor—$896.38."

"Why the thirty-eight cents?"

"God knows. That is the twenty-five miles of road between the river bottom and the Parsons ranch."

"But that is good road!"

"Sure it is. I'll tell you why. Three surveys were made of it, by three different men—ran the bill close to a thousand dollars, you see. Work was started on it each time and the survey declared useless by two road bosses, both experienced men. We spent—here it is—$1,698.50 on dirt work alone—all wasted—before John Bonner rode into camp one day seeking a freight contract. The road boss saw him and wept with joy—nearly. Parnell—he was superintendent then—promised John the freighting contract if he would straighten out the road mess.

"Is that a plain enough argument or do I have to point out to you that we had nine hundred tons of ore lying in the sheds during the mixup, and our overhead mounting every hour?"

Archer didn't answer. There was no answer. John Bonner had cut so deep into the roots of many of Archer's sacred convictions and traditions that the sap was beginning to dry up in them—just a little. But his dislike of the man deepened, and he couldn't have told why.

Sibley could, if he had realized it. Sibley opposed and challenged Archer in a way that John never dreamed of doing. But Sibley appreciated the very real ability of the superintendent and his excellent management of the mine. The yield of ore was increasing steadily under Archer's regime, and there was a new spirit of alertness in the workings and above ground.

John acknowledged the increased output from the tunnels, but to him Archer was scarcely a man. He was an efficient machine with no red blood in his veins. He was something to be tolerated when necessary and forgotten the rest of the time.

It was this unconscious contempt in John's attitude that bit deep under Archer's skin, without his recognizing the source of the bite. Neither Sibley's assurance that John's inborn genius for grade put the average surveyor in the infant class, nor the evidence of his own eyes could persuade Archer that it was not hazardous to leave the company's road building in the hands of such a man. However, he thought he would make no move until the first of July.

John hoped fervently that Archer would stay away from Buck Cañon. If another visit developed as many unfortunate incidents as the first had, John felt that he couldn't answer for the consequences. But Archer came again in less than a month and half way down the hill met Cody.

THE SUPERINTENDENT recognized him and stopped short. John, behind him, looked on with grim amusement. Neither he nor Cody had any conception of Archer's state of mind at this evidence of rank insubordination. To them it was not that. Their attitude was a matter of simple arithmetic. John was the master here because his was the responsibility. Archer, with his inherent and trained respect for position, as such, could no more get their viewpoint than they could get his.

But he did not speak. His experience with Bonner had taught him to look well before he leaped—if his temper would let him. His eyelids flickered a little as his gaze left Cody. John recognized the sign, but Archer's anger affected him only with a touch of disgust. This matter had been explained. That should be enough for any man.

Farther down the road Archer stopped again, even more abruptly.

"What have you broken the line for?" he demanded. "That's a devil of a looking road—almost level for two hundred yards, then dropping down the hillside at such an angle as that—fifteen per cent. if it's one!"

"The steepest part of it is only nine per cent," John told him. "I don't exceed

nine per cent. anywhere. Come down and look at it. I can explain to you why I had to run the line as I did."

"You can explain it here."

"I can't." John's impatience wasn't too well under cover. "You have to see the formation to appreciate the difficulty we are meeting there."

Archer slid down the hot hillside, perspiring freely and cutting a boot open on a sharp stone and getting in a more evil humor at every yard. John realized it, but didn't care.

"This," he explained, stopping at a bluish green bank, "is a peculiar sort of clay—crumbly, you see, nearly like fine shale, but harder to deal with even than shale. The proper line of the grade cuts through the foot of this bank, which is about twenty-five feet high and would menace nearly two hundred feet of road if we built it here."

"Why?"

"It crumbles—don't you see?—and works out, cracking in sections for the entire height and then falling forward. That is the reason I ran the line above, on that ledge, and then dropped down."

"We can go back into the hill far enough to be safe."

"We can't. I committed the folly of building a road through this formation once. In the first place it won't hold bottom in wet weather, and in the next place it cracks and crumbles so fast that we would need a man here most of the time to keep it cleared away."

"That's nonsense! A few charges of dynamite would blow the whole bulge off the mountain."

"There's another point." John was trying to hold his temper, for he knew the gravity of the matter. "Powder doesn't work worth a hoot in it—just puffs out and doesn't move enough dirt to pay for its use. The dirt has to be brought down by hand, and that means danger to men because it's such tricky stuff."

Archer considered a minute before he said deliberately,

"This all sounds like pure gibberish to me."

John paused, then flung down the gauntlet.

"It's you who talk the gibberish."

The tone was so quiet that Archer could scarcely believe he had heard the words.

"What did you say?"

"You heard me."

Archer's resolution got clear away from him.

"Well, now you can hear me! I'm through with you! You can get off this road job and stay off it. Your freighting contract expires next month, and it will not be renewed. I don't like your methods, nor one damn' thing about you, for that matter. Do I make myself plain?"

"Very."

For the moment, it was the only word of which John was capable. For all Archer's animosity, the possibility of losing the freighting contract had never entered John's head.

Hauling from the Quintere mine could be done only with teams until the new road was finished. John had attended to all that hauling for five years. Recently, to meet the demand of increased output, the freight contractor had gone heavily into debt for more horses and wagons, knowing that in another year he could clear his paper and sell off gradually as he bought trucks. But being forced to dump his property on a very limited market within thirty days would leave him practically bankrupt.

He found a trail, a cut-off to camp, and climbed back up the hill in a daze, too appalled for coherent thought.

Archer had returned to the top of the grade and told the foreman, who handled the work in John's absence, that Archer himself was taking charge and the first thing to be done was to lay out a new line for the road. A surveyor would be over soon. In his anger, Archer totally forgot Cody.

The gray haired blacksmith, who was one of those rare artisans, an expert drill sharpener, folded his heavy arms and asked Archer calmly—

"You hef fired Yon fum dis yob?"

"Yes," answered Archer shortly.

The blacksmith took off his leather apron with grave deliberation. In it he rolled a number of carefully selected tools stamped with his own initials. He donned a greasy cap and jumper and turned to the watching superintendent.

"Gif me my time."

Archer gave it, and orders on the office to two thirds of the road crew that night. Not to Cody, however. Cody kept out of sight. He mustn't lose his job until he had to. John would understand that. These fellows who didn't have half a dozen mouths to feed could express themselves. But Cody knew the way he must travel and he followed it doggedly, although his loyalty was no less than theirs nor his resentment over the change any the less bitter.

John had avoided meeting any of the men and had found his horse and ridden back to the mine. So news of the sympathetic strike did not reach there until the men arrived from the road camp in the morning. After supper John told Sibley what had happened.

"No, John! He surely didn't say that! He won't do that!"

"I guess he meant it." John's voice was heavy.

Sibley, who knew Bonner's financial circumstances, found moderate speech difficult.

"Just wait till I get hold of him! I'll—"

"What's the use?" asked John. "Cussing out a man doesn't get you anywhere—not if he has any sense at all. I'd rather you didn't say anything, Sibley. I'll weather through, somehow."

John couldn't talk about it any more, and for two hours he helped Sibley check freighters' lists. Then he sat idly by while Sibley continued work. John didn't want to go to bed. He didn't want to get by himself and think, not until he had rested and built up a little reserve power.

"What is this?" he asked, picking up a sheet of paper and glancing down a long list of items. "Why, it's road equipment!"

Sibley looked up at him.

"Didn't Archer talk to you about that?"

"No."

Sibley grunted wearily.

"I told him that you should be consulted about it, that you'd probably know something of the contractor who is offering that stuff for sale. I supposed he'd seen you. He sent young Paulin out to inspect it. Paulin thought it was a great bargain for three thousand dollars."

John studied the list for some time but made no comment. After a while he got up and went out. In his own room he sat down on the bed, arms on his knees, hands clasped loosely, eyes directed at the floor. He had to face it. He had to think.

And the thought uppermost in his mind was not the ruin which was staring him in the face. It was not the question of whether he could get an extension of credit from his bank that would let him salvage a little of the wreck. The thing that stood out in his thought was the road.

He liked this particular job better than any other he had ever done. He liked his crew, each of them a square, clean hitting man. He liked every detail of the work, from the bite of steel in a stubborn rock to the cook's daily growl over the meat supply. He liked the sting of the sunrise air, and the heat and sweat of the day, and the opal that lay in against the Lost River peaks at evening. . . .

John's shoulders tensed a little. It hurt far more than he wanted to admit to himself. He had never before been forced to give over a thing before it was done. He had not realized how deep seated was his pride in the finished job—something that men would use for generations, maybe—something that would stand the battering of the years, because it was honest . . .

And what about his men? Cody would be fired. What on earth would Cody do? He wasn't very strong. When had John ever before been unable to offer work to a man in difficulty? And the men on the freight haul. The new contractor would

be sure to replace the poorer ones—the ones who needed their jobs the worst—with men he knew.

And the road equipment Archer was buying, without a word to him. Archer needn't have ignored him so pointedly. There was grim jest in the fact that he knew what that equipment was. John was forced to examine his own mind at this stage of his reflections. He was not naturally introspective, but he sat on his bed for an hour, motionless, and considered the structure of his own character.

AT FOUR o'clock the following morning, Sibley was wakened by a knock on his door. John's voice answered him and Sibley switched on a light.

"I am going out with Hammond's load of ore," said John. "He's down with lumbago. I want you to tell Archer, Sibley, that he had better look over that road machinery he is buying. Just tell him to go down and do some investigating himself. That man Garland offered me the same lot a year ago. He's a crooked rascal and I suppose he's fixed things up enough so that they'll serve a week or two. Doubtless he has painted them. The compressor that he has down for fifteen hundred is worth about two hundred if you're willing to put a thousand dollars' worth of repairs on it. The hammers are so worn that they won't hold a piece of steel true. Every one of those fresnos is patched, and that maintainer— Tell Archer to go through the paint and see what he finds."

Before Sibley could answer John had turned and left him.

Archer, arriving from the road camp, was about as approachable as a bear with a sore head. He had to find men for the road work and he had to hunt a surveyor. It had been easy to say he would send one, but all the surveyors he knew were a long way off and they were busy.

When Sibley, who was in no pleasant temper himself, told the superintendent that it would be a good thing to have Garland's road equipment looked over by somebody who understood such things, Archer retorted—

"You didn't say anything when I sent Paulin to do it."

"More fool I," grunted Sibley. "But I'm telling you now. You had better inspect that stuff yourself while you are out getting men."

"But that is a long trip, just extra expense—"

"Suit yourself!" interrupted Sibley shortly. "What the hell's a mere clerk doing, anyway, to advise one of these omniscient general superintendents?" And he dipped his pen too deep in the ink and grievously blotted a journal page.

Five nights later John stepped into the office and Sibley asked at once,

"Did you make arrangements with the bank to carry you, John?"

Bonner shook his head and asked a question.

"You didn't use my name in talking to Archer about the Garland deal, did you, Sibley?"

"I should say not. Why?"

"Well, I guess that Archer went out there and investigated and found what he had to find. Garland must have suspected me. He has some pull at the bank and when I went back to put the last touches to my business, I found that it had all been called off."

Sibley swore. A minute later he suggested hopefully.

"That isn't the only place where men know you."

"No. I haven't had time to try anywhere else yet, but—well, you see, it's going to look queer to the others—my being turned down by my own bank."

Sibley felt sick at heart. He knew that never before had the big contractor been refused credit. That could cut to the bone with a man whose word had been as good as currency.

John could never discuss his own affairs at any length and he now changed the subject.

"How is the road coming?"

Sibley frowned.

"Didn't you warn Archer against going through that blue clay?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's going through it, has put them to clearing away the whole bank. The new foreman thinks it is all right, although the few old hands still on the job told him what you said."

"Archer would give orders. The foreman wouldn't have any choice."

"No. But he's new to road work, too. He has a lot to learn and the mine is going to pay for his education."

"I hope," said John, "that there won't be any difficulty. I think I'll ride over there tomorrow."

JOHN GOT to the road camp at five o'clock in the afternoon to find it apparently deserted. A swift investigation confirmed his first impression. He flung himself back on his horse. There wasn't a particle of doubt in his mind as to what had happened. It seemed to him that he was not moving at all as he tore along the road to the cañon, passed deserted tool and blacksmith sheds and raced down the grade.

Rounding a bend, he found his worst fears realized. Men toiled like ants at a great blue green mass blocking the road. When he stepped among them, they raised their sweat streaked faces and commanded—

"Take charge, John."

"Who's caught?" he asked.

"Cody."

"Not *Cody!*"

"Yeh. He always worked in the middle. Said he savvied this damned dirt better'n the rest of us."

John divided the men and spread them out. He put his watch into the hands of the oldest man there and told him to rest one of the three groups of workers every three minutes. They could, he believed, stand the six minute work period for some time if the rest intervals were regular. His heart was lead in his breast as he looked at the mass they were tackling.

It was about this time that Archer walked into the mine office. Sibley glanced up and spoke, then looked back again, something in the superintendent's bearing attracting his attention. Archer did not sit down but stood by his desk in an unfamiliar, hesitating manner.

"Sibley," he said, "it was Bonner who told you about that road machinery."

"Yes."

"When did he tell you?"

"About five hours before I told you."

"That same morning?"

"Yes. Woke me up to tell me before he pulled out for Melrose."

"Is Bonner here now?"

"No."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Yes."

Archer looked at the clerk. Sibley sat with his chair tilted back, his hands in his pockets, his eyes stony. But to divert or embarrass Archer, once his course was set, wasn't possible.

"Where is he?"

"He's at Buck Cañon. Oh, he went over to get some of his own things. No law against that, I suppose?"

Sibley's tone was as unpleasant as he could make it, but Archer did not answer, seemed scarcely even to hear. He sat down at his desk and set to work. Sibley went out to check up an incoming freighter.

After supper Archer saddled a horse and rode off in the direction of Buck Cañon. Sibley scowled at his retreating back and wondered what—and why.

Archer arrived after dark to find one man in camp—the cook—putting up lunches with furious speed and laconic to the point of discourtesy as Archer dragged from him an account of the accident.

"The man you fired is over there diggin' 'em out," he concluded.

Archer made no reply but watched in silence. When the cook was ready to leave, he asked—

"Shall I carry one of those boxes?"

For a moment the cook stared. Then without a word he heaved a box of food up to Archer's saddle horn.

BY THE light from gasoline lanterns the work of digging out the imprisoned man was still going forward.

"But, John," the red headed boy protested, his chest heaving painfully as he rested against the bank, "he's dead now—"

"Probably," John answered. "But we never know—till we know."

He shoveled doggedly on, thanking his stars that he was compelled to work. For John was much closer to a loss of self-mastery than he had ever been in his life before. His contempt for Archer was turning into active hate. Cody! Cody, who had for years worked to the limit of his slender strength to give his family the bare decencies. Cody, who never shirked nor complained nor passed the buck. The thought of Mrs. Cody turned John weak. He knew how it would be, there.

And John Bonner knew, too, the futility of hatred. But the blood throbbed sickeningly in his temples as he visioned himself punishing Archer as he felt he deserved. His own trouble came back to him—the senselessness of it and the injustice of it. What had this overbearing snob of a superintendent done since he came here? Got out more ore! Brought confusion and fear and despair to people who were trying to do their work!

John straightened his back and rubbed his hand heavily across his eyes, realizing he must call a halt upon his feelings. He heard the men speak of supper and looked up to see Archer dealing out lunches.

John trembled a little as he stooped to his task again, now, with sudden clearness, honestly afraid of himself. Why couldn't the damned fool have stayed away! What business had he here? Did he think he could make a gesture or two and clear himself?

When his own turn came to rest, John stepped to the edge of the grade, out of the range of the lanterns. He looked across the black void of the cañon, struggling for a grip on the blood lust that had risen in him. He heard a step and turned to see Archer standing beside him in the dimness. The superintendent mutely held out a sandwich.

John looked from the hand to the shadowed face, and spoke between his teeth, his words the more ugly for their lack of oath or emphasis.

"It's too late for you to begin to act like a human being! You gambler with the lives of men!"

There was no describable expression in Archer's eyes as they met steadily the wicked gaze of the other. John stepped closer, his great arms half lifted. Archer did not move. A high pitched voice broke through.

"What the hell!"

John sprang into the light.

"I hit a rock!" went on the voice. "I know I did! Here—now—wait! There it is! What's a rock doing—?"

John was shoveling furiously and soon revealed an edge of stone.

"It's one of those big sandstone slabs from above!" a man cried. "Maybe, oh, maybe—!"

The impossible, crazy hope became proved reality in five minutes. A great flat rock, loosened at the first motion of the crumbling bank, had evidently started to slide a fraction of a second before the dirt.

The men worked madly now, those who couldn't find shovels digging with their hands and pieces of board. John suddenly felt his shovel slip forward without resistance. He knelt and scooped the dirt behind him so fast that it had the appearance of a steady stream. In ten seconds he had a hole at the edge of the stone large enough for a man's body. He reached in and touched flesh. He seized and pulled, but somehow the man was caught.

Then John stooped beneath the stone, arched his back and heaved mightily till the lower end of the great rock lifted a little and Cody was dragged swiftly to the air.

The red headed boy sprang erect with a shriek.

"He's alive! Oh John, he's breathing! He is!"

John picked up the unconscious man and laid him at the edge of the grade, face down, forehead on arm, and kneeling astride the back helped the faint, uneven breathing by a regular in and out pressure of his palms just below the ribs.

The men stood around in tense silence following the slow, uniform movement with an almost agonized attention. Once Cody gasped as if strangling, then went utterly limp, and they moved forward in a surge of despair. But John's shoulders rose and fell steadily, and rigidity once more possessed the group. Standing in their sweat soaked garments, the men did not realize that they were shivering violently under the bite of the raw night air. Every sense, every faculty was concentrated upon the prone figure at the edge of the road. Such prayers as they knew were being offered up for Cody.

At last he moved and an involuntary gasp escaped the spectators. John turned him over and lifted his head and shoulders, and Cody opened his eyes. It was ten minutes before he could grasp what had happened, but his senses returned in a rush when two men picked him up to carry him to camp. He cursed them roundly. They could get to hell away from him! He had a picture of himself being lugged up the road like a baby! What did they take him for, anyhow?

But Cody couldn't stand on his feet, much less walk, and he was borne away amid a wild hilarity.

When they were all gone, John took down the last lantern and turned to climb. Then he saw Archer. He walked up to him and for a minute they faced each other in silence.

"Will you look at this?" Archer drew a paper from his pocket.

John took it and unfolded it. After one glance he looked up sharply.

"I have signed it," said Archer. "All it needs is your signature. That, and the amount of money—whatever you think is right."

John stared intently at him, suspicious, trying to fathom him.

"You will see," Archer went on, "that the contract is to expire with the completion of the new road, whenever that may be. We will have to fix up a different one when you go into trucks."

John's hand, still holding the paper, lowered. He meant it!

"And as for this road—John—build it any way you see fit."

John carefully set the lantern down at their feet, and they looked across it at each other.

The WINGED NEMESIS

An Iceboat Dash for Stolen Furs

By JOHN BEAMES

MALCOLM HAMPDEN heard dully the cracking of whips and the shouts of the dog mushers.

Consciousness was returning. He got his hands under him and raised his face from the snow in which it was buried.

There seemed to be a film over his eyes, but he could dimly see several dog trains mount the ridge and disappear. There was an excruciating pain in his head. He pulled off his mitten, put his hand up to the sore spot and brought it away covered with blood. He stared at it stupidly.

It was still some moments before he could piece together all that had happened. He had been breaking trail for the trains when he first saw the men lurking in the clump of young spruces halfway up the slope. Something in their appearance seemed to him suspicious and he shouted back for the trains to halt. Then he advanced with his rifle ready.

Shooting broke out immediately, both in front and rear. He had received a violent blow on the head. Now he was sitting in the snow, and men, dogs, carioles, all had vanished.

There was a furrow across the crown of his head. It was only by the grace of fortune and an exceptionally thick skull that he was alive at all. He had evidently been left for dead.

He got to his feet, which brought into view something he had not seen when lying in the snow. Half hidden by a stump, lay a body. With swimming head and trembling knees he walked over to the body and bent down.

"Charlie Two-Bears—well, poor old lad," he muttered. "Shot in the back. Oh, the dirty swine, the dirty swine! This is Joe Naruk's doin', him an' Paul Vielle. Wonder who the rest of the gang was. Anyway, they got away with the four trains and forty thousand dollars' worth of pelts. An' poor Charlie's dead, an' I'd be dead too but for a bit of luck."

He sat down beside the body and held his own aching head in his hands.

"Now what'll I do? It's four days back to Wolverine, and old Cameron'll be glad to see me. Oh yes, go snifflin' back that somebody robbed me of the whole winter's trade. Cameron'd like that. And it's five good days' travel to Gibtown, and I got nothin' but what I stand up in. Oh damn, my head's sore! God's curse on those cowardly swine! Wonder if I could catch up with 'em? Do me a lot of good if I did when I got no gun. But the pelts was put in my charge. I'm responsible for 'em."

He struck his hand upon his knee.

"I'm goin' after 'em. I'll hound 'em; I'll hound 'em till I drop. I'm not done yet. Might meet somebody on the trail an' get help. Anyway, don't matter, the company's put the pelts in my charge an' I'm the man responsible. Wish they'd left me my gun. It's goin' to be tough without."

He stared at the dead Indian before him.

"Poor old Charlie. Hate to leave him for the wolves, but I can't bury him an' I got no time an' no ax to make a pole cache for him."

With his hands he dug a shallow grave in the snow, into which he put the body and covered it, removing as far as possible any trace of the grave. The wolves might not find it, though the hope was a slender one.

He rose and stood with bowed head for a few seconds. "Don't know where you've gone to, Charlie," he murmured, "but you was good enough man to go to any heaven, white man or Nitchie. If it'll do you any good, I promise you that if I live the man that killed you will get a rope around his neck."

The wound in Hampden's scalp had ceased to bleed. He took his handkerchief and tied it over his head and under his chin, then perched his cap gingerly upon it. Then he doggedly took up the trail.

THE HOLDUP had occurred early in the morning just after breaking camp, and it was mid-afternoon before he felt that he had come to the end of his strength for that day. His head was aching unbearably and he was weak from hunger and fatigue. He stripped some handfuls of bark from a birch and made himself a fire.

He was sitting, hungry and discouraged, over the flame when he was astonished to see a white man approaching. The man carried a dead fox over his shoulder and halted ten feet away and stared.

"Good day," said Hampden. "Seen anybody on the trail?"

"Seen six trains, eight men, about noon, goin' down lake," replied the trapper in a creaky and unused voice, and continued to stare.

His face had been tanned a rich mahogany by the snow blink, and there was an intent and faraway look in his deepset eyes. There were gray hairs in the stubble on his chin, but his spare frame was erect and vigorous. He dropped the fox on the other side of the fire and sat down upon it.

"Blood on your face," he said. "How?"

Hampden told his story.

The trapper listened without exclamation or the slightest quiver of his face.

"Uh-huh," he grunted finally. "Some stunt. Goin' after 'em."

"That's what I figure to do."

"Never catch 'em. Goin' too fast. Come on to my shanty for the night anyway. Fix you some grub."

Hampden accompanied him to his little log cabin, nestling on a wooded hillside above the lake, three miles away, and there partook of a generous meal of moose

meat and bannock and tea. His scalp was very stiff and sore but his head was not aching so badly. He was a young man of exceptionally strong constitution.

With his stomach full, his head clear and his fatigue passing, his determination to pursue the bandits and vindicate the trust reposed in him grew every minute more strong. Also he began to devise ways and means.

Since the loads of the four carioles had been distributed among six, the dogs would be able to move faster than a man could follow them on foot. Unless he overtook them before they reached the railhead at Gibtown the bandits would be able to rip off the burlap coverings of the fur bales, dispose of the unmarked pelts to different dealers and slip out of town before news of the robbery came in.

HAMPDEN looked out through the shanty's single tiny window across the great ice plain of Copper Lake, tinged with a blood red glow by the setting sun. He recalled that he had last seen it heaving in azure waves under a bright September sun. If it were only summer again and he had a canoe . . .

But it was not summer and a canoe would be useless. But—he took a deep breath—that was the solution. He turned eagerly to the taciturn trapper, stolidly skinning his fox.

"Say, know anything about iceboats? I heard the things can sail like the devil. Ever seen one?"

The trapper stared at the wall in silence, then he made a negative noise.

"*Nkh-nkh.* Heard tell of 'em. Uh, got a pitcher of one somewheres."

He rose and began to turn over a tattered bundle of old periodicals, and presently produced one that contained three small pictures of ice yachts.

Hampden seized it eagerly.

"That's the thing. Why couldn't we build a thing like that? You give me a hand with it. I bet the company'll make it worth your while. What say?"

"Uh," said the trapper after a long pause. Loquacity was not his failing; a snort signifying acquiescence and a negative grunt made up the greater part of his conversation.

"Well, come on, we'll start right now," cried Hampden, eager to begin. "The sooner we get started the better chance we have of catchin' 'em."

The trapper rose and began to stretch the fox pelt on a cleft board.

"Say, what's your name?" inquired Hampden.

"Brown. Uh, mostly Brown."

Hampden gave him a sharp glance, but there was no hint of humor in the impassive face and dreamy eyes.

Brown got out his tools; a saw, an axe, a hatchet, an auger, a hammer and a few nails, some pieces of rusty haywire, various lengths of rope of several thicknesses, and a large bundle of *babiche*, or strings of raw moosehide.

"Ought to be enough here to make a mess with anyway," he commented, "but a ice boat—" He sniffed irritatingly.

Hampden decided to build his boat on the lake ice, and he chose a sheltered cove. The day had been very mild but, as often happens at the end of a northern winter, sunset brought a fanged wind from the north and the temperature fell rapidly.

The most careful examination of the pictures had given him only a vague idea of how to build an ice yacht, but he had natural mechanical aptitude and he had grasped the essential principles of construction.

He chose for his frame dry spruce, light, tough and resilient. For runners he sought and found a tamarack with a natural curve. The whole he bolted together with birchen pegs, reinforced by haywire and *babiche*.

Brown worked well and with intelligence, for manual dexterity and resource are essentials for a northern trapper, and by morning, weary eyed and stiff backed though they were, they had a craft that gave promise of being able to sail.

They rested for two hours after breakfast and Brown slept, but Hampden

abstained by the exercise of heroic self control and roused the trapper as soon as he dared. Brown rose uncomplainingly, and they went down to step their mast and bend their curious blanket and canvas sail. The light breeze was offshore, passing over the iceboat where she lay under the bank.

"Got to push her out till the wind catches her," said Hampden, gazing with doubt and anxiety upon his unhandy looking craft.

Would she sail even in a wind?

"Now, if we had a team of horses," said Brown reflectively. "Hard work pushin' this the whole way."

Hampden glared at him. Humor was not his strong point at any time and just now he was in very deadly earnest. He resented jests. Yet the trapper's face was woodenly impassive and no least glint of mockery shone in his abstracted gaze.

THEY pushed and pushed and presently the heavy sail flapped in a light puff of air. Flapped again, bellied out, and the ice boat was moving of herself. They took their places on board, Hampden far aft, over the steering runner, and Brown at the foot of the mast.

Sluggishly she drew out from the land, dead before the wind. Hampden began to feel despair creeping over him. At this rate they would be a couple of days working down to the end of the lake.

"How'd it be," suggested the exasperating Brown, "if I was to get up an' blow on this here sail."

"You got too damn' many funny remarks to make," snapped Hampden.

The trapper merely rubbed his nose and stared at him solemnly.

For a moment Hampden felt murderous. His head was aching again and he was irritable from loss of sleep. But then he remembered the trapper's prompt, willing and generous service, and how ungrudgingly he had handed over virtually everything he possessed to a total stranger. He was a fair minded man, and he recognized Brown's right to find amusement where he could but the feeling of exasperation continued.

Brown seemed to realize the strain under which Hampden was laboring.

"Don't mind me," he apologized quaintly. "Always was a little funny in the head."

They were still moving, but in the wrong direction, for the wind had hauled a point or two and was freshening. They were now headed almost due east instead of south.

In his absolute ignorance of iceboating, Hampden had some doubt as to whether his peculiar craft would sail at all on a beam wind. But it had to be tried. He hauled in his sheet and put the tiller over.

She came round with gratifying obedience and her pace actually picked up. He experimented once more and made the amazing discovery that with her sail fore and aft she was transformed from a creeping thing into a bird that went dipping and curtseying over the wind packed ridges of snow in a way that made him want to rise and cheer.

He turned a flushed and laughing face on the silent Brown.

"Now what do you think of her?" he challenged.

"Pretty good if she don't flopsize."

"Get out on the runner on the wind side an' hold her down," directed Hampden. "Begad, we are goin' to catch them! This thing's goin' twice as fast as any dog train."

"Uh-huh," agreed Brown, showing no enthusiasm.

But Hampden could no longer keep silent. He was bubbling with the joy of achievement and had to talk.

"What'll we call her?" he queried.

"*Jackrabbit*," suggested the trapper after a pause. "She's a hopper."

"Right, *Jackrabbit* she is. Watch out, we're goin' to hit a bump."

The whole surface of the great lake was seamed with innumerable cracks; some old and frozen over, some newly made and still open. Stretches of ridged snow alternated with belts of slush or of glare ice. Fortunately they encountered no wide

crack, and the *Jackrabbit* squelched through the slush and took the narrow ones in her stride.

On the dry snow she moved at a respectable pace with a sharp hissing noise, but on the glare ice she all but flew and her runners rang like a bell. Hampden had some moments of almost delirious happiness, guiding her down a winding ice lane until it twisted to the west and had to be abandoned.

The sky was clear and the sun very bright, but the wind still carried its winter edge, and Hampden was soon cramped and shivering on his narrow perch. Brown philosophically rolled himself in his fur robe and lay down and slept on the hard frame as peacefully as an infant in a cradle.

IT WAS still broad daylight when their progress was halted by the south shore of Copper Lake. Hampden had been looking out hopefully for sight of the robbers, but they had already entered the forest, as their trail showed. This was perhaps fortunate, for he was so numb and stiff by this time that he could hardly retain his grip on the sheet and the tiller.

He ran the *Jackrabbit* ashore and she pushed her nose into a deep soft drift and stopped. Brown rolled over with a snort and sat up.

"Fine trip," he grunted. "Damn' fine sleep. You must be froze."

"Pretty well," agreed Hampden with a hollow laugh, trying to get up, but finding himself unable.

Brown was beside him in an instant and had helped him to his feet.

"Stamp your feet," he directed, "while I get a fire."

In a few minutes he had a noble blaze soaring upward and had unloaded the *Jackrabbit* of food and bedding. Hampden sank down with a sigh of exhaustion on the robe the trapper spread for him, and Brown swiftly removed his footwear and rubbed his numb feet with snow, afterwards covering him with a blanket.

The trapper hastened to make ready a meal; they had not stopped to eat on the way and both were ravenous. But, driven by his tyrannical sense of duty, Hampden was already talking about getting the *Jackrabbit* over the portage before the last mouthful had passed down his throat.

Brown suddenly waxed almost eloquent.

"*Nkh-nkh.* No can do. You're nuts. Get hung up in the dark. More trouble than it's damn' well worth. They can't get away from us now—the old *Jackrabbit* 'll run down any dog ever lived. An' what shape are you in to put up a scrap, huh? Your ears hangin' down right now. G'wan, get some sleep an' don't talk crazy."

Hampden scowled at him, but he was too weary to fight an' his head was aching blindingly. He let himself sink back.

"Well, don't let me sleep too long," he begged.

"Sure, I'll rout you out soon enough."

Hampden's tired eyes closed. Brown covered him gently with blankets, made up the fire, and went to see what he could do with the *Jackrabbit.*

Brown was afraid at first that she was too wide to pass along the narrow trail and that she would have to be taken apart, but he decided finally that it would probably save time to cut down the obstructions. However, he lowered the sail and unstepped the mast so that it should not catch in overhanging branches. Having done all he could, he returned to the fire.

Hampden was sleeping like a dead man, and the trapper put some more logs on the glowing coals and sat down beside it. He spread no blankets for himself so that the cold should wake him when the flames died down, and the night passed for him in a series of uneasy dozes.

Two hours before dawn he prepared a meal and woke Hampden.

"This is the big day," he said. "Eat hearty. You mightn't never eat again."

Hampden's headache had passed with his fatigue. He was bubbling with energy and impatience. He was up and pulling on his footgear at once.

"What time is it? Oh hell, why did you let me sleep so long? We got to get goin' right away. I don't need any breakfast."

"Well, I do," replied Brown, unmoved. "We don't do no travelin' till I got this empty place filled up." He munched his bannock and took a leisurely drink of tea.

Hampden rushed over to the *Jackrabbit* and grunted with satisfaction when he saw she had been prepared for the portage. He was back again in a moment and snatched up a can of hot tea, which scalded his mouth. He went swearing back to the *Jackrabbit* with the blankets, and returned to plead almost tearfully with the imperturbable trapper.

"Hustle up, for the love of Pete!" he groaned. "They'll get away on us."

"Not 'less they grow wings they won't," returned Brown.

AT LAST they began to drag the *Jackrabbit* across the portage. It was slow and tiring work, for the runners sank deep in the soft snow and she had to be coaxed round trees and stumps, or wait till the obstacles had been chopped down. They were three hours covering as many miles, but the day was still young when they hoisted sail on Lac des Vaches.

The sky had clouded over through the night and the weather was thick, the wind gusty and uncertain, and flurries of snow beat upon them at intervals. But Hampden had learned by now how to handle his craft, and the *Jackrabbit*, close hauled, made good way even in the lulls.

His perpetual questions were:

"Can you see 'em yet? Sure we ain't run past 'em?"

And Brown, standing on the windward runner, hanging on by the guy, replied each time with a negative grunt—

"*Nkh-nkh.*"

At the end of two hours he said suddenly:

"What I can see is open water. Better stop her."

Hampden let her come up into the wind and halted her. Then he shinned up the mast. From east to west across his whole line of vision stretched a wide lead, the water black against the snow. He could see the trail of the robbers trending off shoreward, about six miles away.

He slid down and stood for a moment in deep thought. He looked at the trapper from beneath frowning brows.

"I'm goin' to try an' jump her," he announced. "We'll lose time if we run inshore; the wind don't hit the lake till about a half mile out. If we wait for a good gust it should carry us right across."

"Hop to it," replied Brown readily. "I come out for fun."

The wind died away. Hampden controlled his impatience by making a careful examination of all the miscellaneous lashings that held the craft together. The starboard runner was sprung above the bend and he whipped the split end with *babiche*. By the time that was done a squall was sweeping out from shore toward them.

They pulled the *Jackrabbit* round by hand to meet it, and in another moment she was driving hard through a whirl of snowflakes, Brown conning her.

"There she is. Pull a little to the left if you want to hit her square. More yet. Back a little. Steady. Hold her an' holler for help."

A fleeting glimpse of a coal black ribbon of water, a splash, a bump, and they were over.

"How!" yelled Hampden, his eyes blazing and his clenched teeth showing in a convulsive grin.

"Uh-huh," grunted Brown, unmoved.

THE SNOW thinned. Far ahead the lower end of the lake came into view. There stood the old Lac des Vaches post, now abandoned, and there the trail struck overland seven miles to the railway at Gibtown. Could they overhaul the robbers before they reached the shore and escaped into the bush?

"My gosh, don't you see nothin' yet?" groaned Hampden.

The trapper's telescopic eyes had been fixed for a minute past on some almost imperceptible black dots on the horizon. It was another minute yet before he replied.

"Dead ahead, old-timer," he said. "I wasn't sure at first. Make up your mind now whether you want a scrap."

"I'm goin' to have those bales," returned Hampden grimly. "Scrap or no scrap. They were put in my hands to take care of."

The trapper nodded.

"Might be something stirrin' then."

"Think they've seen us yet?" queried Hampden.

"Soon will anyway. Keep her the way she heads."

He sat down and took his rifle out of its case. It was spotless and he handled it with affection, testing the magazine and examining the sights. Hampden's heart warmed toward the man as it had not done hitherto. There was something in his calm acceptance of the probability of a murderous fight that indicated courage and dependability of a high order. His appearance had changed also in some subtle way; his face had lost its wooden impassivity and his deep eyes seemed to emerge from their caverns and catch a gleam of light.

Hampden's own weapon was the trapper's single barreled shotgun, dangerous enough at close quarters, but somewhat inadequate for an attack on eight armed men who were fighting with a rope around their necks. But Hampden's mouth only closed tighter. It was his duty to recover the bales, and he was not imaginative enough to know much about fear.

Brown stood up again, his rifle in the hollow of his arm. They reached a stretch of glare ice and the *Jackrabbit* picked up speed and swooped across it like a hawk, her sail fluttering as the sails of an ice yacht do at high speeds.

"They seen us," reported the trapper. "They're scared stiff. Uh." A pause. "*Nkh-nkh*, they're goin' to fight. Watch out." He dropped to his knees.

They had closed the range to three hundred yards. Suddenly the air was full of the whine of bullets and the crackle of rifle fire. Hampden instinctively ducked and was ashamed of himself. Brown, lying flat on his stomach, fired back.

The fire was too hot and too well directed. Hampden was compelled to alter his original intention of charging right into the midst of the enemy and demanding their surrender. He let the *Jackrabbit* fall off a point and they passed at two hundred yards range in a tempest of bullets.

It is as difficult to shoot accurately from an object moving at thirty miles an hour or so over a rough surface as it is to hit such an object, and there did not appear to be any casualties among the bandits.

As they drew out of range, Brown turned his head and the gleam in his eyes was stronger.

"Pretty hot stuff," he remarked. "Bit off a little more'n you can chew, didn't you?"

"They have," corrected Hampden grimly. "I'm just startin' to commence. Wish I had a rifle, though."

"You got both your hands full navigatin' the old *Jackrabbit*," said Brown. "It's a one man job. Uh. I'd do better shootin' if she didn't hop around so much. I hate to miss."

"We'll go back an' give another dose," said Hampden. "Got to keep 'em from gettin' ashore with the pelts."

He put the *Jackrabbit* about and closed on the other tack, and again they were greeted by a hail of bullets. Hampden recklessly came in to within a hundred yards. Two or three bullets struck the frame, one chipped the mast and one passed through the peak of his cap.

The attack nearly ended in disaster. They had passed; but while still well within range a bullet severed the sheet neatly within a foot of the sail. The *Jackrabbit* promptly flew up into the wind and stopped dead.

THE BANDITS counter attacked in open order, advancing at the run under the leadership of a tall white man and firing as they came. Hampden identified one of them as Naduk, his treacherous assistant. The other six appeared to be halfbreeds or Indians.

While Hampden jumped out to secure the flapping sail and knot the severed sheet, Brown knelt as coolly as a man at target practise, shooting rapidly but accurately.

The tall man flung up his arms and fell. That broke up the rush; the others flung themselves down and opened fire.

Hampden jumped back on board and the *Jackrabbit* darted away again.

"Stopped 'em, begad!" cried the trapper in a voice like a trumpet. Then, amazingly, he began to sing:

> "She's only a bird in a gilded cage—
> A hell of a sight to see.
> She's a moulty old hen with peroxide hair;
> They can keep her right there for me."

"Some song," commented Hampden, grinning in astonishment.

"I ain't sung—not to say sung," said Brown, "since outside Cambrai in 1918. There was heap plenty trouble that day an' I copped a blighty. I'm feelin' the way I did that day, uh. I never sings only when I'm fightin'. Let's go back an' give them bums blazes."

"We're goin'," grunted Hampden joyously, and put the helm down.

A heavy gust was blowing. Hampden felt that with the way he had on the *Jackrabbit* he could attempt a small strategy. Coming down as if to pass to leeward at close range, he bore up and crossed astern at fifty yards' range, enfilading them. He had the satisfaction of banging off his shotgun, though without any apparent result.

As they drew off they could hear one of the wretched dogs hyelping in agony.

"Gosh, I hate to do that," said Brown. "Honest, it was a accident."

"We got to keep 'em from gettin' ashore," repeated Hampden inexorably. "If we can't get them we'll have to kill the dogs. I don't like it any better than you do."

Once more the *Jackrabbit* spun on her heel and swooped by while the rifles crackled and bullets whined. Brown gave a sound between a growl and a squeak and put a hand to his head. Blood was trickling down his neck when Hampden put the *Jackrabbit* aback and went to attend to him.

"Just my ear," said Brown, grinning like a boy. "That'll learn it to stick out so much, eh? Come on, this is just beginnin' to get interestin'."

"We got to do something damn' quick, an' that's all there is to it," said Hampden.

THE ROBBERS had not been idle all this time. They halted only momentarily to repel attacks and set the trains going again. The hard driven dogs were tired and no longer able to move fast, but in the past half hour they had shortened the distance to shore to less than a mile. Soon the *Jackrabbit* would not have room to maneuver, and once the lake was left behind, she could not pursue at all. Once in the bush the bales could be taken to pieces and the furs scattered far and wide by friends and relations, beyond all tracing.

"Just one thing to do," said Hampden. "Either we get away with it or it's good night. We'll run 'em down."

"That's the talk," cried Brown. He was singing "Mademoiselle from Armentieres" in a loud voice as the *Jackrabbit* gathered way for her last pounce.

Bullets whipping by, the *Jackrabbit*, under the thrust of a heavy puff, stood on one runner as she careened. The stolen sleighs were dead ahead, and the bandits knelt in the snow in front of them and fired for dear life.

"Hang tight!" yelled Hampden.

The startled robbers had risen and were scattering. Brown pushed his rifle into the face of one and fired. There was a shock and a howl as the starboard runner passed over another.

Hampden let go the sheet and flung the tiller over, and the *Jackrabbit* crashed into a standing cariole.

He was flung out upon his hands and knees, but retained his grasp upon the shotgun. Naruk was ten feet away and he swung to fire. Hampden jerked the shotgun up and pulled the trigger. He

had a glimpse of Naruk's face, blasted out of all human semblance, as he went over, backward.

Two halfbreeds fired at him simultaneously, and missed. He sprang at them, swinging his shotgun by the barrel. He heard the skull of one crunch under the butt as he dropped. The other fled.

He heard firing behind him and Brown singing. He turned. The trapper lay in a twisted attitude among the wreckage of the *Jackrabbit*, shooting at three flying men who dodged and doubled like hares.

"Oh, I shave me with a broadax,"

Crack!

"An' I comb me with a hoe."

Crack! The fugitives flung themselves into the bush and disappeared, apparently unhurt.

"Damn' bad shootin'," said Brown in a dissatisfied voice. "I hate to miss. But I couldn't get set right for shootin'. This here old *Jackrabbit*'s a-layin' on me an' I think my leg's broke."

"Well, we got the pelts back anyway," said Hampden.

THE BASQUES

By

Leonard H. Nason

IN THE south of France and the north of Spain lives a very ancient race, the Basques. They inhabit for the most part the Pyrenees, but there are a great many of them on the seacoast and the plains on both the Spanish and French side of the mountains.

The origin of this race is unknown. They speak a language that has no counterpart, either in the modern languages or in those of past civilizations. They have customs that are not common to any other race or country. Yet their tombs, the oldest of which in existence dates only from the sixteenth century, bear signs that are common to the older civilizations of the world.

First among these is the swastika, which appears not only on Buddhist temples but on Indian pottery and beadwork in North America. An ancient fresco in an Italian museum shows this sign embroidered on the robe of a Roman senator.

Another common decoration of the Basque tomb is the zigzag line that represents lightning. This is another universal sign, used in exactly the same form both by the Berbers of Northern Africa and the Indians of New Mexico. The tombs in themselves are highly distinctive, all being of a conventional shape, a circle supported by a truncated cone.

The Basques themselves are a fierce, proud race, the men universally handsome, agile and strong; the women equally beautiful.

The Basques have little to do with foreigners—French and Spanish are included in this category—and do not intermarry with other nationalities. This last custom is so strong that it amounts practically to a law, which is indeed a sad state of affairs, for the Basque women have no equal for power of attraction.

No Quarter

By W. TOWNEND

MOST ruthless of all fighting men is the soldier who goes into action having in his heart a deep and burning hatred of the enemy. To such a man killing is no mere duty, performed in blind obedience to the orders of his superiors, but the direct expression of his whole being, the one immediate aim in life.

MacCorbin, who was twenty and came from the South, hated the Germans, individually and collectively, as a Kentucky mountaineer might hate the slayers of his kinsmen in a family feud.

This is the story of his first engagement.

IT WAS evening once more—July and hot. The sun had set. The sky was still flushed with pink.

There was no actual front line, but in rifle pits and shell holes and hastily dug trenches, on the fringe of a shattered wood of pines and beeches, men in steel helmets and khaki crouched and waited for what fresh horrors the night might bring. Their faces were tanned and lined, plastered with white chalk and sweat; their eyes were strained and anxious; their mouths hard; their uniforms torn and slovenly.

In front of the wood they held was a wide stretch of white, sandy ground, covered with patches of sparse brush, sloping upward gradually to another wood, through which before morning they would have to force their way or die, as those others had died who now lay in the open where they had fallen.

For a time the fighting had lulled. On either side the guns were silent, save where far off, miles distant to the north, the men waiting could hear the dull throb of drum fire and knew that another attack was being launched.

In one end of a stretch of dry ditch that had been deepened into some semblance of a trench were six privates.

Four of them, MacBride, Hennessey, Bridger and Thompson, survivors of the original platoon that had left New York in the fall, squatted on the trunk of a

A powerful battle story that delves deep into the emotions of the livid drama that is war

young birch tree that had toppled into the ditch and had been trimmed of its branches. They talked listlessly in low voices. Their rifles, with bayonets fixed, rested against the parapet, handy in case there might emerge from the wood opposite men in gray whom they would proceed to kill, without undue waste of energy or ammunition, killing being their business.

Another of the six, Marshall, a boy of nineteen, stood in the extreme corner of the trench, shielded from observation by the limbs of a tree and a tangle of broken branches and brushwood. He watched the German position intently.

At a point where the trench twisted back at an angle of about 135°, skirting the front of the wood, the sixth man, Bates, knelt and adjusted a puttee that was loose. He was a fair sallow man with thin features, a mustache, and sleepy eyes that seemed to miss nothing of what happened. From time to time he glanced to his left at the four men on the tree trunk and smiled to himself.

MacBRIDE, a long, lank Texan, yawned.

"Could sleep fer a month, I guess, if I had the chanst!"

"After I'd had some chow, me too!" said Bridger, who was Middle Western, from Iowa.

Thompson, a hard bitten, red headed Californian from the desert country up Ludlow way, grinned and then sighed:

"Gosh! Any sign them damn' ration carriers gittin' up thisaways tonight, hey?"

"Nary a sign," said Hennessey; an ex-sergeant, with a fondness for whisky, he was Boston Irish. "We're Reg'lars—we don' wanna eat; they says we fight!"

"Et me iron ration two days ago, Gawd help me!" said MacBride. "Nawthin' yesterday, as I'm a livin' sinner; nawthin' to-day! Three dawgone nights without sleep."

"Guys," said Thompson, "I gotta eat."

"To hear you bums talk," said Bates, "you wouldn't think there was a war, nawthin'."

The four men on the tree trunk regarded him in silence. They did not like Bates. He talked too much.

"To hear you talk, Bates, you'd think you owned the dawgone war!" said Bridger. He broke off quickly. "Say, listen to this what's comin'!"

The boy, Marshall, ducked.

Overhead there was a high, wailing sound that grew louder and louder, passed, and ended in the loud *crump* of a heavy shell bursting back where the supports would be awaiting orders to move up.

"S'long as the ol' Boche keeps that range I ain't worryin' none," said MacBride.

Marshall was smiling uncertainly, his face white in the twilight.

"Thought it was nearer," he said.

"No need to apologize," said Bates. "Considerin' you wasn't taught that disappearin' movement on no parade ground, you done it right smart!"

"Fellers," said Thompson, "war ain't all it's cracked up to be! I got cooties breedin' all over me, I ain't had a wash since Pete knows when, nor nawthin' to eat. I ain't slept in a bed so long I can't remember if you put yer head or yer feet on the pillow. An' top of everythin' else, I got the chanst o' goin' to Kingdom Come any minute, expeditious."

"Bo," said MacBride, "you said a heap o' sense! They ain't bad soldiers, the Heinies, what I've seen of 'em!"

"I'll say they ain't! Brave as you'd find anywheres."

"Sure they're brave! Too damn' brave, some o' them guys! D'ye mind that fella we bumped off coupla days ago? Stuck to his machine gun, he did, an' knocked out Gawd only knows how many us chaps, an' wouldn't surrender, though we was wishin' him!"

"That's so! Good fightin' man, the ol' Boche!"

"Kinda feel sorry for 'em sometimes," said MacBride. "Gittin' it in the neck good an' plenty, ain't they?"

A voice that was new to the men in the trench said—

"What made you say that?"

They turned their heads quickly and saw a thin, boy's face and angry eyes under a steel helmet.

"It's an orf'cer," said Hennessey. "Beg pardon, sir."

"That's all right," said the officer. "Don't get up!"

At that the four men on the tree trunk grinned.

BEHIND the officer was the platoon sergeant, old Culbriddy, with the row of medal ribbons on his blouse and the scar of a bolo slash across his cheek.

"This salient is the most advanced part of our position, isn't it, Sergeant?"

"It is, sir," said Culbriddy.

"H'm! You're keeping a good lookout, I hope."

"Yes, sir," said Marshall.

"I've taken over the platoon," said the young officer gruffly.

He looked not much more than a lad, younger than Marshall, even: a little self-conscious and embarrassed, possibly, but friendly and apparently eager to do the right thing.

"My name's MacCorbin. Perhaps you'd better tell me yours!"

Rather startled by the request, they told him.

MacBride, Hennessey, Bridger, Thompson. Each spoke in turn.

The officer who had given his name as MacCorbin nodded toward the man crouching down at the corner where the trench twisted back along the front of the wood.

"Yours?"

"Bates, sir."

"Yours?"

He spoke to the boy next him.

"Mine, sir—Marshall."

"Been out long?"

"Two weeks, sir. Two weeks with the regiment, sir."

"I see. Getting on all right?"

"Yes, thank you, sir," said Marshall.

"We tote him along as a kinda mascot," said Bates. "He's ornamental, if he ain't nothin' else."

MacCorbin glanced at him with a frown and spoke to MacBride.

"What made you say you felt sorry for the Germans?" he said. "You can't expect to win battles if you're sorry for the crowd you're up against, can you?"

He gazed toward the German position, silent and sinister in the dusk, the shattered pine trees, dark against the sky, the hillside and the first dead he had ever seen. He shivered suddenly, though the night was hot, and then turned and studied the grim and tired faces of the men who were with him in the trench. Hennessey, Bridger, Thompson and MacBride, unshaven, bronzed, covered with the grime and muck of three days' fighting, were, he felt, soldiers—men who would push on to the bitter end, against odds, or hold on, with no thought of retreat.

Bates, the narrow faced, sallow man with the fair mustache and the cruel, sleepy eyes and the tigerish mouth, puzzled him. He did not trust him. Yet Bates, too, was a soldier; perhaps the best soldier in that short trench. In battle, where other men might show mercy, Bates would kill for the lust of killing. The man was a killer. Brave, of course; cruel, no doubt; but worth a dozen of young Marshall. Glancing at Marshall's angular profile under the steel helmet, MacCorbin was suddenly doubtful. He knew instinctively, watching him, that Marshall was scared. He gave the impression of being broken in spirit by what he had suffered.

And tomorrow these men were some of the men he must lead across the open into the wood. And they were sorry for the Germans. God Almighty!

"I WANT to tell you about my brothers," MacCorbin said. "My eldest brother was in Paris when war broke out. He joined up with the French and became an airman; he was shot down and crashed behind the German lines in the spring of '15. He died in hospital. They treated him badly, neglected him, didn't forward his letters home, didn't let any one know where he was. Maybe you'd say that wasn't the fault of the Germans. Well, it was the fault of one damn' German, anyway. That we know for a fact. He died of neglect. Right, that's the first of 'em!

"The second brother crossed to England in the autumn of 1914 and joined the Gordon Highlanders. He was with the Gordons in the advance after the German retirement on the Somme last year. He went down into a dugout with a couple of other men because they heard a cat crying. They found the cat tied so that it could hardly move. My brother cut the string and set off a mine that blew him to bits. That makes two.

"The third brother was killed in No Man's Land in the spring down Verdun way. He was with the Marines. He was out on patrol at night and was helping a wounded German who'd been lying between the lines a couple of days and a German sniper put a bullet through his head. All right, then, that's the lot! But maybe you understand now how I feel about the Germans. I've got a personal interest in this war because of what I've told you. I'm the last of the crowd and I want to get even. Maybe I'll go the same way as the others, maybe I won't; but I want to do some damage or see some damage done first.

"Anyhow, that's why I don't like to hear you fellows talking about feeling sorry for the Germans. We've got to fight tomorrow and fight like hell!"

"We have the reputation, sir," said Sergeant Culbriddy.

The men grinned.

"I know that, Sergeant," said MacCorbin, "but what I'm trying to impress on you all is, don't stop to take any prisoners! This war's going to be won by killing. Understand what I mean, MacBride? It is MacBride, isn't it? You can't kill if you feel sorry for the man you're fighting. That's why I don't like to hear you say you're sorry for the Germans! That's why I don't want you to take prisoners. Killing's your job, MacBride, and every one else's job, too."

Bates laughed.

"Killing's what we come out for, ain't it?"

"Killing!" Marshall uttered a harsh noise, deep in his throat. "Sure, that's what we come out for, killing!"

"Who in hell's the fool talking about killing?" said another voice.

Darkness was falling but MacCorbin could see the lean, haggard face and dark eyes of the man who had just made his way through the brush into the trench.

"What are you?" he asked sharply. "Where've you been?"

"Mr. Searle took me off, sir, to help bring up some ammunition that had been dumped at the reg'mental P.D., sir."

"I see. What's your name?"

"Rutherford, sir." The man spoke respectfully enough, but roughly, as if impatient at being questioned. "I didn't know there was an orf'cer here, sir."

"That's all right," said MacCorbin.

This man, Rutherford, was of a different type from the other men in the trench. He was powerfully built, not tall but lean and wiry; capable, probably, of enduring any amount of hardship without harm, yet from his manner not such a good fighter as Bates. He seemed sullen and morose, bitter almost—a man likely to be sensitive to shell fire or the sight of death and not so cheerful when things went wrong as MacBride or Hennessey or Thompson or Bridger; but a sound man, notwithstanding; best, perhaps, fighting with his back to the wall, in defense, not in attack. This, at least, was the impression he gave in those first few minutes. MacCorbin continued—

"You were saying something about killing!"

"Didn't mean nawthin', sir," said Rutherford.

"He's another that wants the war over," said Bates.

"Mebbe the war'll be over soon enough fer most of us," said Rutherford, "without a hero like you sayin' so!"

"I ain't trying to be killed," said Bates. "You are."

MacCorbin, feeling rather perplexed, spoke to Culbriddy.

"Let's be going on, Sergeant. And, you men, remember what I said. We've got to kill if we want to win the war, so don't you birds worry your heads about taking prisoners!"

He moved along the trench, followed by Culbriddy.

"Who's he?" said Rutherford presently.

"Dunno," said MacBride. "He blew in durin' the heat of the combat to teach us the meanin' of love yer enemies!"

"No prisoners, hey!" said Rutherford. "Who in hell wants to take prisoners! Better be killed straight off than be took prisoner, too!"

"What d'you know about it, hey?" said Bates. "Ever been in prison yet, Rutherford, or is that a pleasure to come?"

Rutherford spoke without heat or emotion.

"One o' these days, Bates, you'll git a bullet through you and it won't be a German bullet, neither."

"Say," said Hennessey, "you guys cut it out! Rutherford, you talk too much for the good o' yer health!"

IN ALL battalions there will be men who are mysteries to other men. Rutherford was one. An old soldier, who had rejoined his regiment at the outbreak of war, he was a silent, somber man. Queer tempered, likely to fly into fierce rages without adequate cause, a heavy drinker, yet in spite of MacCorbin's hasty summing up, as fine a soldier as there was in the company. At the best of times a man who had little to say, he had of late been silent, more unapproachable than ever before. He seemed to be suffering, physically as well as mentally. His face was drawn and peaked, his eyes were worn. Although he said himself that nothing could ever tire him, he had the appearance of being exhausted. Uneasy and restless and quarrelsome, he was most composed and cheerful when under shell fire or in an attack.

Men respected him but did not care for him. Like Bates, he had no friends

in the company. Unlike Bates, however, he made no attempt to be friendly.

"Whadja make of the little loot?" said Thompson.

"Nice boy, I dare say," said MacBride, "but wait till tomorrer an' see what he does when we gits to movin' up ag'in' that wood!"

"Talk about gall!" said Hennessey. "Well, say! Seen nawthin' an' comes along talkin' just like a grown man! Take no prisoners, says he! Wish the ol' colonel could 'a' heard him!"

Marshall spoke to Bates over his shoulder.

"What did you wanna say that about me for?"

"I said nawthin', kid," said Bates.

"You did. I won't stand fer much more yer damn' kiddin'!"

"Say, tomorrer, don't you git to hangin' back same as last time!" said Bates. "No lettin' other fellas do your fightin' for you, young Marshall, an' don't you forget it!"

"Seems to me I heard some one talkin' about a twisted ankle only yesterday," said Rutherford. "Bates, where was you when we got into that wood? An' last week you was sick an' takin' pills! Doggone funny how many times you been out of it, ain't it?"

"I don't understand what in hell you think you're drivin' at!" said Bates.

"No," said Rutherford. "No, mebbe not. But you will understand if you're anywheres near me tomorrer, Bates, which you won't be! You're a helluva talker, sure, but I've gotta see yet what kinda fighter you are!"

"Damn funny!" said Bates. "That kind o' bein' funny don't cut no ice with me. Listen, fellas . . ."

Sergeant Culbriddy crept through the thick undergrowth at the back of the trench.

"You birds gotta cut out the yappin'! Next thing you'll have some one turnin' a machine gun on you to quiet you."

"Don't believe there's no one left in that wood at all," said Bridger. "We ain't had so much as a chirp outa them since long 'bout four o'clock. They've gone back, I bet."

"Mebbe you'll have the pleasure later o' crawlin' out on combat patrol to investigate," said MacBride.

"Mebbe not," said Culbriddy. "That bit o' wood's goin' to git hell mighty soon now; all the guns they can lay their hands to."

"No chanst of any chow before next week, is there?" said Thompson.

"Yeh. Seen the ration carriers on their way up."

"Thank Gawd fer that!" said Bridger.

"Huh! I bet five bucks they forget us stuck here, anyways!" said Hennessey. "Say, Sarje, what about sendin' one of us with our canteens an' mess kits fer our coffee an' slum, hey?"

A flare lit up the sloping, brush covered ground between the lines, making the dusk brighter than midday; but with queer, blue black shadows, it waned gradually and faded into twilight once more.

"An' now fer business," said Rutherford.

THE SHORT summer night was passing. In the east the first faint sign of dawn was visible between the dying down of one flare and the upward flight of the next.

At other times men might have gloried in the freshness of the air, the peace and beauty of the countryside, the stars, the clear sky, the scent of the pine woods. Now, with the reek of death and high explosive in their nostrils, their ears deafened by heavy gun fire, they crouched in their shelters and watched the great shells bursting with flashes of flame and black clouds of smoke in the shattered wood opposite.

MacCorbin once more in the section of advanced trench held by Sergeant Culbriddy and the seven privates, MacBride, Hennessey, Bridger, Thompson, Marshall, Bates and Rutherford, peered through the screen of brush across the open ground at the German position and shuddered.

There were men, perhaps, in that hell, dying, being maimed, torn limb from limb. It was terrible, yet he had no pity.

They must pay the price, just as he, too, and the men with him, might pay the same price at any instant.

Marshall, by whose side he stood, groaned.

"Is anything the matter?" said MacCorbin.

No one was near enough to hear what he said.

"I'm scared," Marshall whispered.

"The Germans?"

"Scared of myself, sir. Scared I'll turn and run. I wanted to ask you, sir, if I can't face it, if I run, or anything, I'd like you to promise this, sir—" his voice was so low that MacCorbin could scarcely hear him—"I'd like you to put a bullet through me. I would."

MacCorbin was troubled. What he had felt earlier in the night was true, after all.

"You'll be all right, Marshall, I'm sure."

"You've not been over yet, sir. I have. Last time I just managed to keep going. Tomorrow I won't be able. My God! I hate this war. It's jus' killin' me."

"You're making things harder for yourself by thinking you're bound to fail. Marshall, there isn't a single man of us who isn't afraid at heart. Do you mean to say you're not so good a man as—" he was going to say Rutherford, but changed his mind—"as any one else. You are. What's the absolute worst that can happen? Turning back, isn't it? Well, suppose you don't! What's the next worst? Being killed! What's that amount to, anyway? You've acknowledged that much, haven't you, by what you asked me to do! You're not afraid of being killed; you've proved it!" He patted his shoulder. "You'll be all right, Marshall, I know."

"I wish I knew it, too, sir."

MacCorbin, despairing of bringing him any comfort, moved along the trench.

MacBRIDE was leaning over the parapet, watching the wood opposite and the bursting shrapnel and high explosive.

"Everything all right, MacBride?"

"They're catching it over there, sir, ain't they?" MacBride stroked the stock of his Springfield. "Maybe they'll all 've gone before we can git to grips with 'em!"

Thompson, the lean, red headed Californian, said:

"This time tomorrer, wonder what the company's gonna look like! The quicker we git across the open the better."

"The bayonet's the only way," said Hennessey.

"You need the helluva long bayonet to reach them guys from here," said Bridger. "It's the gittin' so you can use the bayonet hurts most."

"You'll get there all right," said MacCorbin. "And when you do, remember what I said—no prisoners. You've got to kill."

And then he heard above the crash of the shells opposite a high wailing sound approaching through the air, growing louder and deeper in note, roaring like a heavy train emerging from a tunnel, rushing straight down at him from the sky.

His heart felt weak and empty. Fear choked him.

The men had flung themselves down into the bottom of the trench.

There was a crash like thunder, worse than thunder, the crash of the end of the world, a flash of yellow flame. The earth shivered and rocked with the concussion. MacCorbin was hurled back and then forward again, against the parapet of the trench. He clawed with his finger nails at the chalky soil and bent his head. His steel helmet was tilted over his face. Stones and earth fell on him. A tree toppled to the ground. The air was filled with the pungent reek of hot metal and high explosive and smoke.

When presently he straightened himself up he laughed.

"Nothing in that," he said, and shuddered.

"Nothing in that, did ye say, sir?" He saw by the light of a flare Sergeant Culbriddy by his side. "It's the like o' them nine inchers can lose ye the number of yer mess, just by the blast of its passing,

without it so much as touching yez!"

MacCorbin knew that Culbriddy had reproved him and he was annoyed and ashamed. He felt that the reproof was justified.

He moved on to the bend in the trench.

RUTHERFORD, leaning back, his rifle on the parapet, pointing toward the German lines, chewed solemnly. MacCorbin had an impression that he alone of all the men in the trench was unaffected by the shell that had burst so near. He felt that he had kept his feet and waited for death and was startled that he was still alive.

Almost without intention he asked him the question he had asked Marshall.

"Anything the matter, Rutherford?"

The man glanced at him quickly and then turned once more and gazed toward the wood.

"Big shell that, sir."

His voice was harsh and stern.

"There's something worrying you," said MacCorbin.

"It ain't this, then," said the man.

And then he brought his face very near the officer's and whispered—

"Ever been drunk, sir?"

"Drunk!" said MacCorbin. He was indignant. "Is that how you talk to an officer?"

"Guess I didn't mean that, exactly, sir; no. But I was drunk last week, back at Maubray-le-Petit before we come into the line again. I got a girl at home—Baltimore. If I'm killed tomorrer that's the best way out for all of us, her an' me, both! I'm going to be put under arrest as soon as we're through with the fighting."

"For being drunk?"

"No," said Rutherford. "There was trouble in one of them *estaminets*. Little place, kept by an old woman and her grown up son who was a halfwit and not in the Army. A U. S. soldier, one of our crowd, stole the old woman's money. The son give the alarm just as he was gittin' away an' he turned and hit him. Seems I'm the man."

"But were you?" said MacCorbin.

"No. I wasn't. But I was in the *estaminet* that evenin' an' next day they found a letter on the floor, addressed to me an' postmarked Baltimore."

"That's no proof," said MacCorbin. "It'll be easy enough to clear yourself, won't it?"

"No," said Rutherford. "I was drunk somewheres else. No alibi. I got back to my billet early in the mornin'. Where had I been? Asleep in a field. I'm for arrest, if I come out of this alive. It wasn't me stole the money, I swear, but I can't prove it. And then sometimes I wonder. Was it me? I'm mean when I get two-three drinks in me. No dawgone good. I oughta quit. Well, that's my weakness—booze. They say the halfwit's dead."

MacCorbin was startled by his placidity.

"Who told you?"

"I heard when I was fetchin' that ammunition up. One of the headquarter crowd heard it from some one who'd come up from Maubray-le-Petit with the transport. Maybe it ain't true. More likely it is. I'm the guy what's responsible. I didn't do it, I swear! But did I? Queer the things a man will do when he's drunk, ain't it?"

MacCorbin sighed. It was terrible that just when all his energy should be directed toward killing Germans he should have had this other problem thrust on to him.

"All they've got against you is that envelope," he said.

"One of our fellas seen me comin' out the *estaminet*, he said, at the time the money was bein' stolen. I didn't ask if he give me away to the M. P.'s; that's nawthin' to do with me. But he seen me, he said, an' spoke to me."

"Who was it? Any one I've met?"

"Yes, sir. Bates."

DAWN was at hand. The shells still pounded the wood.

"There can't be none o' them left alive!" said MacBride.

"Them poor fellas layin' out in the

open," said Marshall softly, "are mebbe waitin' on us. Last night I felt today there'd be a full company to march in with 'em."

Bates cackled a shrill laugh.

"Hear him! Say, kid, you oughta be paid for talkin'!"

"What d'you make of it, Mac?" said Hennessey.

"They've gone," said MacBride. "We'll have the first part of our *pasear*, mebbe, in peace an' comfort with time to admire the view!"

"They're still there," said Marshall. "I know they are. An', my God, you'll know it, too, soon enough!"

"Feelin' bad, son?" said Thompson.

"He's scairt," said Bates. "Didn't I say so?"

"You want the butt of a rifle shoved down your ugly trap; or what?" said Bridger.

MacCorbin, alone in the trench with Culbriddy and the seven men, one of whom was a murderer and one a coward, prayed that he would do them credit, the murderer and the coward no less than the others.

But did the men he was going to lead across the open understand what he understood? It seemed to him that men who could talk so lightly of what lay before them, who treated the war as merely an episode in their lives, of less importance than the food they craved, who sympathised with the enemy, it seemed that such men were not the men to push home an attack and kill.

And yet these men had reputation enough as fighters, God knew! He thought of his three brothers—David, with his laugh and his ready wit, dead in a German prison hospital, neglected, alone, broken; Andrew, the Gordon Highlander, killed by that senseless piece of cruelty that brought tears to one's eyes and hate to one's heart; Stewart, killed on patrol, helping the wounded German. And then he thought of himself, the last of four brothers, so soon perhaps to follow them!

Tired of inaction, he walked the full length of the trench held by the platoon, spoke to the two corporals and one or two of the men and presently turned and walked slowly back to the nose of the salient where he stood between Rutherford and Sergeant Culbriddy and tried to distinguish in the dim light the route he would have to take across the open to the wood still shrouded in smoke and the flashes of bursting shells.

He glanced at the faces of the men in the short stretch of trench near him, just as he had done the evening before. Culbriddy, the grizzled sergeant with the medal ribbons on his blouse. MacBride, the long, lank Texan, who was sorry for the Germans. Thompson, the red headed, hard bitten Californian, who thought more of his chow than he did of winning the war. Bridger, the burly Middle Westerner with the nasal drawl. Hennessey, the ex-sergeant, short and thick set and stern. Bates, the fair haired, sallow man with the cruel eyes, a fighter from the toes up. Marshall, the boy, white faced and afraid. And Rutherford, the man who perhaps had killed the half-wit, grim, tragic and silent. To his right, other men, who had made less impression on his mind, whose names he had scarcely memorized—Smith, MacBeith, Harrison, Prentiss, Malone. There weren't so many of them. The platoon was only a skeleton of its full wartime strength.

He realized that the Germans were showing signs of life. Shells were whistling overhead and bursting behind the wood where they were, back among the supports.

In five minutes, he reflected, he would clamber out of the ditch where he stood and, cane in one hand, pistol in the other, walk across the open toward the German machine guns.

He wondered how it would feel to be shot at. He wondered whether he could hide the fear he knew would creep over him. He smiled grimly. He thought once more of his dead brothers. He must kill or he would never again know peace. He felt coldly efficient. A little impatient; a little nervous—but not very.

He looked at his watch again. God, how time did fly!

"Thirty seconds more!" he said.

The hands crawled slowly on. God, how time did drag!

"Twenty seconds!"

If he lived long enough to reach the wood and set his men an example he would be satisfied.

"Fifteen seconds!" he said.

His voice shook. He wasn't afraid, surely. He reached for his pistol. The feel of the butt steadied him.

"Ten seconds!" he said.

The men began to count.

"Nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one!"

"Up you go!" he said, and scrambled out over the sandy, crumbling parapet of the ditch that had served them as a trench.

THE GUNS had lifted. For a moment the wood in front, the sinister, shattered wood, was silent, still shrouded in smoke already drifting away on the light morning breeze.

MacCorbin, glancing quickly right and left, saw the assault waves deployed, long lines of infantrymen in khaki, tramping stolidly across the open, laden like beasts of burden, with rifles and equipment, steel helmets, Chaut-chaut automatic rifles, bandoleers, gas masks, grenades, two hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition each man.

He saw the dead, the white sandy soil, the scattered brush, the broken trees with their green foliage wilted. He saw beyond the wood the flashes of shells bursting. He heard his own husky voice saying—

"Don't bunch there!"

He heard some one laugh; Rutherford, he thought, but was not sure. He heard, next, a burst of sound, like thunder, a cataclysm of sound, the roar of a typhoon, a sound not to be compared with any sound his ears had ever heard. Machine guns massed, hundreds of machine guns, their individual *tocka-tocka-tocka-tocka-tocka-tocka* blended into a devastating roar. He heard the bullets whipping over his head; he saw men dropping, stumbling, lying still; he saw the bayonets.

He was alive still. Christ! But for how long! His neck and back were damp with sweat. His throat was parched. There was a tightness in his chest, a burning pain across his forehead. His limbs were without strength. He shouted:

"Come on! Come on!"

He bent his head and quickened his pace.

Men, he noticed now, were running, intent on reaching the wood whence came the storm of bullets. The ground was rough, scarred with dry rain channels and gullies, pitted with shell holes. It was difficult to keep going without tripping.

He heard above the machine guns' roar Rutherford's voice.

"Get on you, Bates, or I'll bayonet you!"

"Come on!" he yelled. "Come on! Into 'em!"

God Almighty! how they were falling!

He was afraid now, in grim earnest; not of being killed—he would be killed, he was sure—but of being killed too soon.

"Get on, you, Bates, damn you! Get on!"

Rutherford again. What the devil was the man up to?

MacCorbin turned his head and saw Culbriddy's honest, red face at his elbow; Marshall, pale and distressed, but moving ahead quickly; Rutherford, still alive, fierce looking and hard and angry; Bates, white like Marshall, stumbling, gasping for breath, whimpering; Hennessey, Bridger, MacBride, Thompson. He saw them all. Others of the platoon as well — Harrison, Prentiss, Jacobs, Bradley, Smith, Hughes, Robinson, Malone. He saw Jackson, the company commander—Jackson! What in hell was he doing so far ahead? And his orderly, away on the left. He saw the commander fall and the orderly, bending over him, fall, too. Nearer, Thompson, the red headed Californian, hurled his rifle away from him, doubled up, his hands clasped to his belly, and rolled over like a shot rabbit.

Damn those machine gunners! Damn them! Wouldn't they ever let up?

"Come on!" he shouted. "Come on!"

And then MacCorbin knew that the attack was breaking down. All impetus had gone. Too many men had been killed.

His foot caught in a hole; he tripped and pitched forward.

Culbriddy threw himself down by his side.

"Stay where ye are, sir! Wait!"

"We've got to get on," he said, panting.

"Give them time, sir. If it wasn't fer the dip in the groun', sir, that's saved us, we'd none of us be here now!"

They lay on a flat sandy piece of ground, sheltered by a steep bank a yard high. With them were Marshall and MacBride, Bridger, his face smeared with blood, Hennessey, smiling a tight lipped smile, and others.

IT WAS full dawn at last. The sun had risen, but the open space across which they had struggled was still in shadow. In front of them, behind the wood, the sky was pink. Back of them, the German shells were crashing, sending up huge masses of smoke and earth, smashing down big trees. The bullets of the massed machine guns whistled overhead.

"Damn them!" said Hennessey "Damn them to hell!"

He sprawled at full length to the right of the bank that sheltered them, cuddled his cheek against the stock of his rifle and began firing.

"Helluva lot o' good, that!" said Bridger.

There was a strangled cry. MacCorbin turned his head and saw Bates crawling toward him, his face livid, damp with sweat and lined and old looking, stark terror in his eyes, bareheaded and with his fair hair plastered over his forehead. Rutherford, bleeding from a wound in the neck, his lips parted in a grin, crawled after him.

"I'll git you into the German line, you white livered skunk, if I have to bayonet you every yard o' the way!"

"For Gawd's sake, let me be!" Bates whimpered. "I'm sick."

"Yeller from the toes up. Tripped he did, fellers, an' lay on his face, so he wouldn't be made move! Git up this livin' minute, Bates, or I'll make you!"

He prodded him with the point of his bayonet. Bates shrieked.

"Damn you, lemme be!" He wept. "I can't, I tell you."

He reached across and dragged at MacCorbin's arm. "Sir, make him stop! I'm hurt. Can't you see I'm hurt, damn you! I ain't fitten to die, neither! Let up, Rutherford, fer Gawd's sake!"

He squirmed and screamed. The survivors of the platoon, dirty, tired men, huddled under the bank, watched in silence.

Rutherford caught hold of Bates by the back of his neck.

"What's that you say? You ain't fitten to die! Believe me, you ain't, sweetheart! No more ain't I. But if I can die, guess you can. Up you git, dearest! We two gonna reach the Germans, if the others ain't. D'jer hear me? Up with you!"

"I can't. Christ, lemme get outa this! I'm gonna give myself up, damn you! I stole that money, I tell you. Rutherford, I gotta give myself up. It was me took that money. He fought, damn him! I didn't mean to do him no harm, but he took a knife to me, an' fought."

Rutherford let go of his neck and twisted him about and stared at him with a look of blank amazement in his eyes.

"What's he yappin' about?" said MacBride.

"God!" said Rutherford. "You seen me comin' out that *estaminet*, you said. You dawgone liar! You killed that poor halfwit an' let me be blamed!" He clenched his fist and struck him on the face. "You Judas!"

"That'll do," said Culbriddy. "Are yez crazy?"

"Do you hear what he said, Sarje?"

MacCorbin, sickened, roused himself from the stupor that had held him and said gruffly:

"Cut it out, Rutherford! We've got to be moving on."

Bates turned and on hands and knees began to crawl down the slope, bareheaded still, without his rifle, toward the wood from which they had advanced.

Suddenly he screamed, rose to his feet and began to run, then leaped into the air, dropped, and lay still.

"I hope he's got some kinda excuse when they git him on to the carpet where he's gone to," said Rutherford. "He'll tell 'em a pack o' lies, I bet, but they won't listen! He blamed me for what he done, but cleared me in front of all you fer witnesses! I don't care now if I die or live!"

"Look!" said Culbriddy. "Look there, sir!"

FROM the trees that were being shelled by the Germans long lines of men in khaki deployed in combat groups were advancing.

"The supports are up," said MacBride. "Look, the poor fellas are gittin' it! Lookit! God! See them fallin'!"

From the left there came a roar of cheering.

"We're in on 'em over yonder!" said Bridger through bandaged jaws. "Good ol' roughnecks!"

"You're damn' right," said Culbriddy, "we're in the wood."

"How we gonna stop them machine guns in front of us, hey?" said MacBride.

MacCorbin wriggled forward and lay near where Hennessey was shooting at the right of the bank which sheltered them and peered through a tangle of brush at the wood.

A voice called to him—

"Sir, Mr. MacCorbin!"

He turned his head and to his surprise saw Marshall in a shallow gully farther still to the right and some four or five yards in advance of where he lay.

"Sir," he said, "I can see the gunners workin' that gun jus' ahead, plain as anythin'. If some one could knock it out it would clear the way, like, fer the rest of us."

"All right, Marshall, we'll do our best right now."

"Believe I got one them guys!" said Hennessey. "Two, mebbe." He fired again. "Believe they got a sniper layin' out somewheres in front."

MacCorbin shouted to the men sheltered by the bank:

"You fellows ready? When I jump to my feet, follow!"

He glanced back at the waves of men moving up the slope. They were very near now. There was something, he felt, majestic, almost stately, in their advance. But Lord! To see men drop forward and lie huddled up and know that they were dead!

He waited. Another minute and he and the platoon would join in their final rush.

"Mother o' God!" said Hennessey. "Look!"

MacCorbin turned and saw Marshall crawling on hands and knees up the dry rain channel between sparse and scattered bushes toward the wood.

A lump rose to his throat. Marshall, of all men!

He jumped to his feet.

"Up!" he yelled. "Up, the lot of you!" He scrambled over the edge of the bank and ran forward through the brush.

Only another fifty yards and he would reach the machine guns. Fifty yards, but the worst fifty of all. Would he last? God, just to have one chance at them. Alive, still.

"Up! Up!"

Rutherford was by his side, red faced, grinning.

"Not so dawgone fast, that orf'cer!" some one shouted.

"Come on, then! Come on!"

A bullet snicked the edge of his steel helmet; he staggered, recovered himself and plunged forward.

He saw Marshall in front of him rise out of the ground, race up the side of a steep slope of white earth and, poised for an instant, arm uplifted, fling a grenade. There was the crash of an explosion, black smoke, screams. And then Marshall fell

and slid down the slope into the brush.

"They got him!" said Rutherford.

MacCORBIN pushed on. His heart was thumping fiercely. He was close up to the machine guns now and he was not yet dead. One gun had been put out by Marshall; that was why he was still alive, perhaps! Another gun—he could see the blunt ugly snout—swung about. He was finished. How could they miss him at so short a range? There was no burst of firing. He could see the rounded helmets of the gunners. Jammed perhaps, or out of ammunition! He heard himself yelling:

"Come on! Come on! Give 'em hell!"

Rutherford thrust himself in front of him.

"Out of it, you!"

His bayonet flashed. There was a wild scream from a rifle pit almost at his very feet.

"Got him!" said Rutherford.

He grunted and lurched forward across the body of the German he had killed.

MacCorbin cursed. Rutherford gone. He scrambled up the last steep slope. He could hear the yells of the men who followed. Nothing could stop them now, he knew.

He reached the crest of the slope. He saw before him broken tree trunks and dead Germans. He smelt high explosive and raw, fresh blood. A cold rage possessed him. He was alive and could kill. He gazed down into the broken machine gun emplacement and raised his pistol.

And then before he could shoot, before he could avenge the first of his dead brothers, there rose out of the ground in front of him dead men—dead men with yellow, corpselike faces, and red eyes and hollow cheeks; men in round steel helmets that came down over their ears; men in dirty gray uniforms that stank of sweat and dirt and wet cloth; men in an agony of fear; dead men; corpses whose faces were the faces of men who have lived in hell and torment.

"*Kameraden! Kameraden!* Mercy! Surrender!"

They held their hands above their heads and whimpered. The machine guns were silent at last. A deathlike stillness had settled on the wood. The yells of the advancing infantrymen sounded thin and unreal.

"*Kameraden!*"

MacCorbin hesitated, stunned, horrified. He wanted to shoot. He had his chance. Why didn't he shoot, then?

How could he shoot poor broken devils like these!

They had surrendered. Damn them! They had kept fighting their damned guns to the very last, pouring their bullets in on the men attacking them across the open, and then when they were cornered they held their hands up! Damn them!

MacCorbin turned.

He saw the men in khaki racing forward; he saw the long bayonets glinting in the first rays of the sun; he heard the wild yells; he saw MacBride, Culbriddy, Bridger, Hennessey. He saw men he did not know, men from the 2nd Battalion; hard, sunburnt faces, streaked with sweat and white dust.

"Kill them! Let me git at them!"

MacCorbin heard himself shout:

"Stop that! You, MacBride, put that rifle down! Hennessey, Bridger, damn you! They've surrendered! They're prisoners!"

He raised his pistol. There was no other officer living, only himself.

"Get back!" he said hoarsely. "Sergeant Culbriddy, these men are prisoners! We must get them sent back at once!"

He saw men surging up the slope toward him. He saw as through a mist angry faces, flushed faces, scowls, jeering grins, eyes that expressed hate and resentment, the faces of soldiers who have endured much punishment and are robbed of their right to kill. He had defrauded them, he felt. He had gone back on his word. He had saved the Germans from the death they deserved. He had done what was right.

"The first man that tries to kill these prisoners, I'll shoot!" he said. "Stop where you are!"

"The fact is," said a voice, "he's gone bugs!"

There was a shout of laughter and something, a clenched fist, the butt of a Springfield—he did not know what—crashed against his chest. He had an impression that he was falling from a great height, down and down and down. He passed into unconsciousness easily, peacefully.

"HELLO! He's comin' to. Look at him!"

MacCorbin lay on his back and stared at the blue sky above him. With an effort he raised his head. Near him were men he knew. Bridger, his face bandaged; Culbriddy, with a shattered arm, smoking a cigaret, his face gray; MacBride, the Texan, sullen and tired looking; Hennessey, his eyes closed, leaning forward, bareheaded, breathing heavily; Prentiss, Harrison, Malone, a corporal whose name he did not know, two other men of the platoon, Jacobs and Bradley—or was one Hughes?

He saw they were watching him. He saw no pity in their looks. He saw contempt and suspicion and rage.

"You're a pack of damned cowards!" he said. "You shot them down after they'd surrendered! What kind of men are you?"

They looked at him uneasily.

"Who shot 'em down!" said Culbriddy. "They're prisoners."

"Lucky stiffs!" said MacBride.

"We got 'em rounded up, the dawgone lot of 'em!" said Bridger. "They're on their way to the cages now."

MacCorbin felt very weak.

"But I thought," said Culbriddy, "you told us not to take any prisoners! Wasn't that the gospel you was preachin' last night, sir?"

"My God!" said MacCorbin, and thought of his dead brothers and shivered. "I'm no damn' good, am I?"

"You're as damn' good as any one," said Culbriddy. "Where would we be now, sir, if it wasn't for you leadin' us up that draw in the ground where them machine guns couldn't rache us an' restin' us there by the bank under cover till the supports come up? The colonel's pleased with you, sir. He's afther goin' past not tin seconds ago!"

And that needed thought, too.

"Well," he said after a time, "whoever it was knocked me out did the right thing. Only—only you see how it was, don't you? They'd surrendered. And now, we've got to be pushing on to our objectives!"

They laughed.

"You'll stay where you are, sir," said Culbriddy.

"We've got to go on!"

"There's about thirty left out the whole battalion," said MacBride.

"We're bein' taken out the line," said Hennessey. "The attack's gone on the best part of half an hour!"

"An'," said Bridger, "nobody knocked you out!"

"Some one hit me!"

"Git away with you, sir!" said old Culbriddy, smiling at him. "You're makin' fun of us. The nose cap of a shell ricocheted an' took you in the breast bone. You're for hospital an' across the water!"

A Story of the Far North and the Mounted Police

The HUNTERS *of* H'WAN

By A. DE HERRIES SMITH

"WHAT the heck is wrong with those Indians? They ain't howlin'. How come, Jackie?" Constable Connors rolled over on the houseboat's hot deck. Shading his eyes with freckled hands, he gazed shoreward to where the white buildings of the fur trade post and the scattered teepees were mirrored on Athabasca's gleaming bosom.

"By Jupiter, but you're correct, Tim!" Sergeant Dorrance agreed, staring at the sun bathed rocks.

There was a faint note of worry in the big man's voice as he went on:

"The Chippewans are usually right up on their toes when the Mounted Police roll in with the government treaty money. Not a ki-yi out of them. Queer. Perhaps there was something in that Fort McMurray talk about trouble on the north shore. Well, we'll know our fate in a few minutes."

"Uh-huh, I'll say we will," Connors grunted, throwing himself flat again with a disgusted thud of his thick set frame. "Never knew it to fail yet. Every time I go on a doggone vacation trip like this some cursed nitchie queers it. What did they invent Indians for, anyhow?" His voice trailed off into a low rumble.

Sergeant Dorrance tilted his Stetson, which sheltered a tanned neck from the sun's assault. Leaning his wiry body against the deckhouse, the youngster went over the affair in his mind.

There was something the matter right enough. The Chippewans had bartered their ownership of the Barren Lands for an annual handful of dollar bills apiece, and usually they were noisily keen to welcome the government boat bearing the treaty money.

The payment time had always been a season of hectic delight for the natives. The quick squandering of the bounty with the traders; tea dances and much noise. Always plenty of noise.

But now the rolling rock ridges beneath the jackpines' dull green were shrouded in silence. Tim was right; those Indians should be howling.

Dorrance slapped impatiently at his yellow striped riding breeches with an imaginary quirt—an old trick of the wide plains far to the south. He stood there flickering a long fingered hand, listening to the steady *chug-chug-chug* of the gasboat pushing the scow, the shrill piping of the gulls circling far above him in the blue dome and the rattling of typewriter keys in the cabin behind.

Old Pettifer, the Indian agent, was getting out another of his long winded reports for the head office at Ottawa.

"Great man for reports, Polecat Pettifer the Pest!" Dorrance's bronzed face was fractured by a momentary grin as he recalled Connors' elaboration of the agent's name.

"Not so far out either," he mumbled. "Guess he'll—"

Whoo—ee—e! Whoo—ee—e!

The shrilling of the gasboat's compressed air whistle cut off his train of thought and a moment later brought a bald head popping out of the cabin hatchway.

"Where are we? Where are we? Nearly in. Huh. Got everything ready, Sergeant?"

Pettifer shot a string of nervous questions at the sergeant, gesticulating with thin hands.

"Yes, sir. All correct and ready to go."

Dorrance stiffened, tugging down his uniform jacket. The other man disappeared again after one quick glance ashore.

THE BUILDINGS perched on the red rocks were now in clear view as the government boat forged forward, thrusting a rippling passage through the glassy lake.

Dorrance frowned when he saw Klapstein, the trader, lounging against the post's whitewashed walls, hands in his pockets as usual. Through the dancing heat waves a schooner's masts were outlined against the shore. Children were running down to the boat landing, shrilling eagerly, pushing and jostling.

The sergeant stirred Connors with his moccasin.

"Hey, Timsy, come to life; we're there."

More prods, and finally Constable Connors lumbered to his feet as the houseboat ran into a sheltered cove and gently nosed up on the sand.

"Hop off and hustle those nitchies aboard," Dorrance ordered. "Your chum, Pettifer, is in an all fired hurry to get on to Fond du Lac tonight. Make it snappy. Wait! Here, give that to the kids."

Connors choked down a grin when the sergeant reached behind him on the cabin roof, caught up a roughly tied package and, with an air of unconcern, passed it over.

"Gosh, he sure thinks a heap more of those dirty papooses than I do," he said to himself, grasping the bag of cheap fur trade candies and leaping ashore.

Dorrance watched Connors climb over the rocks toward the teepees. He frowned again, noting that the sauntering Indians ignored the constable instead of rushing forward eagerly with outstretched hands, after their usual manner. The whole post seemed enveloped in sulky gloom.

Point eared huskies loped down to the beach, peering at the vessel with curious wolf eyes. The clacking tongues in Cree and Chippewan became more distinct.

Dorrance waited in silence and, as the first natives clambered aboard, he beckoned them aft without words, leading the way along the deck.

"INDIANS here, sir," Sergeant Dorrance announced when he entered the long cabin which ran the full length of the houseboat.

"About time. That constable needs waking up. Should be finished here in an hour. You read the roll and I'll attend to

the payments," Pettifer answered irritably, shuffling the neatly corded piles of bills about on the table with white, tapering fingers.

"You go and take a jump in the lake!"

Connors' words from the cabin door were drowned by Dorrance's hasty banging of the heavy record book and his order in Cree—

"*E pe nandomiyan tchi.*"

In response to the call an old man, garbed in tattered deerskins, was pushed forward.

"Chief Taneyigok," the sergeant announced curtly, waving to the Indians with his pen.

There followed hissing queries in Cree from the Indian agent.

"Have the people made a good hunt? Is there much fish? Do the hunters require powder? Any sickness in the teepees?"

To each question Taneyigok whispered a vague reply, his birdlike eyes roving about him.

The snow lines on Dorrance's brown face wrinkled up in annoyance. His gaze searched the cabin's gloom, watching the yellow faces in the half light.

"Something punk here all right," he told himself. "What the devil has got into this bunch, anyhow. Taneyigok is generally chock-a-block with complaints about everything but now he doesn't seem to have any kicks. Trouble coming up. I know the signs."

The chief grabbed a handful of crisp one dollar bills thrust out to him by the Indian agent. The numbers he could not read, but these paying papers were green and they crackled. *Mewassin!* It was the great white king's "eating money" to be paid as long as the snow fell and the ice formed on the lakes.

Taneyigok pried his way through the crowd, eager to spend his bounty on lemon extract and fancy pipes.

"Simone Sparkleyes, high kicker from the Follies!" Connors roared from the doorway, pushing forward a decrepit old squaw.

Pettifer glared up over his spectacles as Dorrance hastily amended—

"Sparkleyes, sir; the chief's squaw."

Klapstein and his halfbreed assistant had shoved into the huddle of staring Indians, watching the treaty ceremony. At Connors' sally their eyes had gone to the sergeant and a low hiss of amusement welled up.

It was well known that Dorrance's respect for womanhood was something abnormal. He saluted gravely and was as courteous to an old tribal woman as he had been to the belles of New Orleans.

Some wag had christened him "the Count" thereby. The North is partial to such things, and from Fort McMurray to the Frozen Sea Sergeant Dorrance was forced to acknowledge the title.

Grunting his disgust at the stuffy air, laden with the smell of camp smoke and fish, the Indian agent hastily thrust a wad of bills into the squaw's hand, waving her away.

For a moment the old woman's talon patted the sergeant's wide shoulders as she left the table. Another hiss of laughter rolled out in reply to the movement.

Then came Peter Kiss the Knees, Wayo, Napoleon No Hat and Otakawasan. They shuffled forward eagerly, each returning with his wad of green dollar bills.

"TUZU, great chief of the H'wan!" Dorrance called in Chippewan.

An uneasy stirring came from the huddle of Indians, but there was no reply.

"Tuzu!" Dorrance repeated loudly.

Still no answer.

"Not here, sir, I think." The Mountie spoke evenly in reply to Pettifer's jabbing pencil and narrowed eyes. Dorrance sensed that the expected trouble had arrived.

"Not here! Not here!" the Indian agent repeated, voice shrilling his annoyance. "Why isn't he here? You posted the notices and sent out word, eh? Your business is to have the natives here on time. Why isn't—"

Pettifer stopped suddenly. Klapstein thrust the staring Indians aside and strode

forward. As the man advanced Dorrance got to his feet and stood leaning across the table. The muscles in his arms bulged; the gray eyes were hard.

Klapstein noted the Mountie's frank hostility. It appeared to amuse him. The trader ignored Dorrance, saying to the Indian agent:

"Somethin's wrong with the Tuzu gang. *Enh, enh.* One of my runners come in with a yarn that they missed the caribou migration north of Attay Lake. Starvin' I guess. Too danged weak to paddle in."

The man finished his story in complete unconcern.

Whites of eyes rolled to the trader, and silence fell on the houseboat. It was broken only by moccasin shuffling and the gulls' faint cries.

Dorrance straightened himself and stared into Klapstein's stubbled face, at his close set eyes and tobacco yellowed teeth. The trader shrugged great shoulders under his dirty mackinaw shirt, returning the Mountie's glare.

"How's that, Sergeant?" Pettifer's fretful voice broke in. "Darn it all, man! Never heard of such a thing before. A whole tribe, fifty hunters, missing from the treaty payments. I can not let this pass. I'll have to report—"

"*Ssh! H'lo'ima te'likom!*"

Two soft words spoken near him flamed across the sergeant's mind, completely obliterating the Indian agent's scolding. They were not of the northern languages—Cree, Chippewan or Slave.

The words suddenly translated Dorrance into another world, threw his mind back to the time when he was on detachment duty in British Columbia.

"*H'lo'ima te'likom!*"

Why, that was the Chinook jargon spoken on the Pacific Coast. The sergeant slowly translated the phrase.

Controlling his features, Dorrance glanced up to see a broad faced Indian woman plucking at Klapstein's sleeve, repeating her words to the trader in a tongue strange to any chance Northern listeners.

In a flash it came to the sergeant that in some way Klapstein was connected with the disappearance of Tuzu's tribe. But why?

"Oh, hell!" A sudden oath from the trader.

Dorrance glimpsed the woman's almost Chinese face turned up to the man in appeal as again her clucking hiss of warning went out.

Klapstein shoved the woman aside, but again her hand gripped his sleeve.

All at once there was a moan from the squaw when the trader's open palm struck her two stinging blows across the face. Several of the Indians laughed.

The native chuckles were drowned by a crash from the overturned table, Pettifer's yell and the thudding of Dorrance's moccasins.

Three leaps carried the Mountie across the cabin. *Whug! Whug!* Two short arm jabs landed on Klapstein's jaw. Taken by surprise, the man staggered back into the mob of Indians as the sergeant's fists beat a tattoo on his head and shoulders.

"Now, you cur!" Dorrance panted. "You may pound your squaw in the post but you won't do it here. Raise your hand to that woman again as long as I'm here and I'll batter you into a pulp!"

Circled by the awed Indians, Klapstein leaned against the cabin wall, mute with surprise. This man Dorrance had lighted into him because he belted his squaw. Did it last year too, by cripes! Getting now so's a man couldn't hammer a dirty, fat, old klootch without one of these red jacketed fellows butting in. Some country!

THE TRADER pulled himself together, white faced, eyes glittering. He circled Dorrance, walking around the cabin to where Pettifer was scrambling upright, clutching at the remaining piles of bills.

"Look," Klapstein growled through swelling lips, "you're in charge of this outfit. You gotta report this fella for assault without no reason. I don't let no guy land into me like that. I'll get

him, see? What's more, I'll get you too if you don't report it. I got a drag at Ottawa. You better—"

"Say, sweetness, you've outstayed your welcome!"

Dorrance was conscious of Connors' voice, saw his thick hand grasp the collar of Klapstein's shirt.

"The exit is upstairs," Tim went on. "First turning to the right. You'll go eventually, so why not now?"

The trader hesitated for a moment, then threw off the detaining hand. Connors' great paw slammed down again, as he jerked out some low phrase Dorrance could not catch. Another moment and Klapstein was hurrying out of the cabin.

"Sergeant Dorrance!" Pettifer's voice was almost a scream.

The little man banged his fists wildly on the table.

"Yes, sir."

Dorrance came to attention but as he stood motionless, looking down into the Indian agent's furious eyes, one long hand motioned as if to throw the quirt into a raging broncho.

Connors hid a wide grin with his freckled hand.

"What the devil do you think this is, a bear garden?" Pettifer exploded. "Damme, what's the force coming to?"

There was no answer. Dorrance's tanned face was a mask. Connors' blue eyes still twinkled open defiance.

"Sergeant Dorrance," the Indian agent said, glaring up at the Mountie, "you will proceed at once to that lake Mr. Klapstein mentioned. Matawa, yes, yes, Attay. You will bring back the missing Indians. I do not wish to be unduly harsh in tendering an adverse report to Ottawa regarding your dereliction of duty. Therefore I shall hold the houseboat for a week."

"A week, sir! Why, it takes—"

"I do not wish to discuss the matter," Pettifer broke in, waving one thin hand in token of dismissal.

The sergeant knew it was useless to argue with a man of this type. He wheeled away and stamped out into the brilliant sunshine. Half an hour later the police canoe was loaded for the trail and the two Mounties were paddling into the North.

From his point of vantage on the ridge crest above, Klapstein watched them pass out of sight. Then the trader broke into sudden action. With kicks and curses to enforce his commands, a birchbark was loaded by the squaw.

White water swirled back from the deeply driven paddles as the man and woman shot along under the red rocks. They too headed for the North!

"THAT swim certainly went great," Tim Connors declared, whisking his shining body with a wet shirt. "Now here goes to cook enough flapjacks and bacon for sixteen men. Then sweet repose. Those flies ought to sleep good too; had a busy day, all right."

Dorrance was thinking hard and made no reply to his companion's chatter. Tim finally gave it up, solacing himself with whistling while he gathered armfuls of dry branches for the fire.

The sun's red ball was just going down behind the Barrens' raw contours, tinting Mamasis Lake with ribbons of purple and gold. The Mounties had crossed the height of land and now the waters flowed to the Arctic Coast; to Attay Lake as well.

And old Pettifer had given him a week to get there, find the Indians in the midst of a howling wilderness and return! Dorrance laughed bitterly to himself. Why, with the best of luck they could not make it to the Attay in less than three weeks.

He might as well kiss goodby to those three golden chevrons on his scarlet tunic sleeve! They had been won on the trail too; they were not badges for clerical work at headquarters. Oh, blast those fool Indians, anyhow!

"Chow!" Connors' voice broke in on his thoughts. "If I do say it myself I'm a dandy water boiler. Gimme any old lake an' a pot and I'll show the Biltmore chef something. Come on, Jackie."

Both did ample justice to the bacon and bannock. Then with pipes aglow the

two Mounties wrapped the blankets about them against the night's chill and stretched on the moss.

Darkness shrouded the hills with its mantle, and soon but for the sleepy twittering of disturbed birds in the branches overhead silence came to the Barren Lands.

But Dorrance could not sleep. His mind reverted again and again to the problem of why the Indians had neglected to go to the post for the treaty payment. It was wholly unreasonable, against all the native ethics of something for nothing.

Finally in disgust he got up and squatted over the fire's red blur.

THE SERGEANT dozed and nodded, half asleep, for about an hour. All at once he became wide awake. A new sound had come to his ears. It was remote from the night noises, from the faint rustlings of the four footed things preying on one another in the forest's gloom.

This sound was distinct—the rustling of cloth against brush and tree stems.

Dorrance reached out a hand to where his pack lay. Fingers closed on the revolver holster, noiselessly extracting the blued shape of the Webley revolver. He cautiously arose, mounded the blanket to give it the appearance of a sleeping man and stepped softly away from the dying fire's faint glow.

To three sides of him the night hung on the trees in a black pall, but down toward the lake faint starlight and the open spaces combined to make a half light. Dorrance padded forward, feeling carefully with each foot before he allowed his weight to press down on the extended moccasin.

A faint white blur showed. The beach he knew. In one place it was fractured by a smudge where the canoe was overturned.

Cr—ack! Whee—ee—e!

All at once the sergeant's revolver barked, filling the valley with wild echoes. With the yellow stab of flame something glittering tinkled to the beach stones.

Moccasins crunched on the gravel. There came sharp, short breaths as Dorrance threw himself toward the moving figure speeding away from the little vessel.

The running man stumbled. Dorrance's fingers clutched his shoulder, slid away again, grabbed once more and buried themselves in a fragment of rough skin.

Another second and the Mountie was aware that he had been tricked. The night prowler had slipped out of his coat. Soft swishing in the brush told the sergeant that the man was deep in the woods and secure from pursuit.

Cursing softly, Dorrance listened for a moment to the sounds growing fainter. He walked back to the canoe, picked up the long hunting knife lying by it and returned to the camp-fire.

"Some curios, eh?" Connors queried.

He threw a handful of twigs on the embers, glancing up at the things in the sergeant's hands when the flames lighted up the glade for a moment.

"A knife and a caribou coat."

"Uh-huh," Dorrance grunted. He held the garment down to the sputtering firelight. "Indian stuff; whiff the wood smoke and the fishy smell of the thing. You know what was going on, eh? That man was going to slash up the canoe so we could not travel—"

"Well, he didn't do it, so why worry?" Connors broke in. "Too darned sleepy for the detective act right now. Ho-hum. Sweet dreams, old-timer."

The sergeant snorted his disgust when Tim pulled the blankets over his head and settled himself. For an hour or more Dorrance sat staring into the black shroud about him. But finally he followed the other man's example and slept the untroubled slumber of the Northman.

With the first pale glimmer of light heralding the dawn the Mountie was out of his dew covered blanket and inspecting the beach.

"Not Klapstein's big hoofs anyhow," the sergeant told himself, peering down at

the footmarks in the sand pockets. "The pads are too small and narrow. They're in turned, too. Might be an Indian's. Uh-huh."

Dorrance followed the trail until it was lost in the tangle of brush masking the tree stems. He turned back for the canoe again. There he stood, shocked into immobility, staring down from under puckered brows at a message written in the beach sand.

He got down on his hands and knees to stare at the script. The whole thing was unbelievable and unreasonable. He rubbed his eyes to make sure he was awake. No, it was there. In the Barren Lands of all places; a thousand miles from the nearest outpost of civilization. The message was written in shorthand!

AS HE stared it suddenly came to the Mountie that the government's business course for wounded veterans of the Great War was going to be of some service after all!

Dorrance spelled the short message out over and over as the almost forgotten Pitman characters slowly returned to his memory.

"Great Cæsar's Ghost! Here, Timsy, quick!"

The sergeant's yell brought Connors trotting down the beach, still swathed in his blanket, eyes bleary with sleep.

"Look at that!" Dorrance yelled, although the other man was but a few feet away.

Tim jumped. It was unusual to see his superior anything but collected and cool.

"Look at what? Oh, that. What is it? Duck been tryin' to do the Fiji Fidget, or some squirrel gone bugs?"

"That's shorthand," the sergeant informed the constable.

"Shorthand! It is, in the pig's eye." Tim replied contemptuously, round face wrinkled in disgust. "Trying to tell me some stenog followed you up here and is writin' you love poems in the sand. Jackie, you're nuts. I tell you that's a duck's ravings. Maybe some strong coffee will keep you from going crazy. I'll start the fire."

"No, don't," Dorrance halted him. "Going to pull out right away. Know what that message is, Tim?"

The constable made no reply but to run his eyes over the other man from beaded moccasins to clear, gray eyes. He sniffed audibly.

"Well, for one thing the unknown says to keep away from the Attay country, and for another he says to get down to the Old Fort as fast as we can," the sergeant informed his companion.

"How nice! Couldn't bust the canoe so he's giving us a bum steer instead." Connors responded, running a thick hand through his hair. "That pig Latin may be the hell diver's eyebrows for all I know, but my guess is that this ramblin' stenog is laying a nice little trap for us. I'm willing to bet this is one of Klapstein's comic strips. Shorthand—oh, cripes!"

Dorrance waved the advice aside, turned away and commenced loading the birchbark.

THE POLICE canoe lay motionless on the still water beneath the branching spruce fronds. Here it was cool, but beyond the shadows Mamisis Lake gleamed like a burnished mirror under the high, red sun.

The sergeant sat with tanned hands grasping the paddle haft. Ducks gabbled noisily along the reedy shores, and far out on the lake screaming gulls wheeled in wide circles.

"By the great Lord Harry but you can soak more slumber into you than any man I ever met," Dorrance said in disgust to the constable.

He stirred the stretched figure with his moccasin and after a few protesting grunts, Connors shook himself and sat up.

"Listen here, sleeping beauty," Dorrance continued, low toned, "if I remember those shorthand signs correctly they indicated that we were to wait at the Old Fort. Well, there it is."

He pointed across the lake arm to

where a mud and boulder made chimney stood out against the rank vegetation. Once a cabin had surrounded the gray pillar, but long since a careless camper's fire had wiped out the building.

Connors nodded, yawned and leaned as if to slide back to the canoe's bottom. A glare halted him.

"You wake up and listen," Dorrance ordered. "Want to tell you about that shorthand. It was not written by a man. A woman did it!"

"Say, it's about time you took up golf," the constable replied wearily. "You're a beautiful liar, and it's a pity—"

"It was written by a woman," the other man repeated. "What's more, it was written by Klapstein's squaw! Shut up now! Remember that racket about her on the treaty boat? Yes, and you'll recollect that I slammed the man last year for much the same thing, eh?"

The sergeant waved another outburst aside and went on calmly:

"Works this way. I heard the woman talking in the Chinook jargon to Klapstein and what she said made me suspicious. Yes, on the boat. Learned that Coast yap when I was down in British Columbia."

"Yes, but—"

"Dry up a minute. Those Siwashes never forget a good turn. By writing that message she was trying to pay me back for punching her man. The poor old devil came down to the camp at the trader's orders to slit up the canoe so's to hold us back. But first of all she wrote that message on the beach. Then she made enough racket so that I would chase her. Had to have some excuse for not slashing up the canoe, see?"

"Well, my poor brain's reeling," Tim groaned. "I can understand the squaw's falling for you after you've been feeding 'em my rations and giving their smelly kids candy for the last three years. But the shorthand? Wow! Who the heck ever heard of an Indian writing shorthand? Ain't reasonable."

"Perfectly reasonable," Dorrance put in. "Down in B. C. the tribes never had a written language. One of the missionaries discovered that the easiest way to teach them to write was to use phonetics—shorthand. Get the point? Right now this same missionary publishes an Indian newspaper in shorthand, and what's more he's translated the spoken Chinook, Shushwap, Lilooet and Okanagan dialects in the same way. Klapstein is a Coast man and he brought this woman from the Stickine when he came up here. She can't write anything but shorthand, and neither can any of her people. Get it?"

"I don't know what the woman was driving at in bringing us here," Dorrance went on after several minutes silence, "but—down! Down!"

In reply to the thud denoting that Tim had obeyed the order the sergeant grasped the branch overhead and pulled the canoe farther back into the leafy screen.

His wilderness trained eyes had made no mistake. The gulls were flying lower now, the nearer flocks being joined by others winging in over the lake.

A MOMENT later a brown blur moved across the shimmering water and a canoe shot into plain view.

"Suffering scorpions! I take it all back!" Connors ejaculated. "Klapstein and his Siwash stenographer! She's either a regular flapper or she's fixed it so's we get it in the neck right—"

"Look! The hunters of H'wan, by Jupiter!" Dorrance whispered. "See the boy holding up that long pole with the bunch of eagle feathers dangling from it. Old Chief Tuzu's sign, right enough."

The sergeant nodded to the second canoe, a long birchbark painted with crude tribal designs and manned by half a dozen paddlers splashing noisily in the trader's wake.

"Your gat all O. K.?" Dorrance mumbled through set lips as a third and fourth craft appeared. "Right, you'll need it. Push off and head for the chief. Take no notice of anything else; scoot right over."

Long blades bit the shining water, throwing the canoe out of the shade into

the eye stabbing sunlight. Half a dozen strokes and the Mounties were clear of the point behind which they had sheltered. Now they could see a whole flotilla of canoes spotting the wide waters.

"*Kekway eoko? Kekway eoko?*" A sudden yell fractured the morning's calm.

Klapstein's squaw had seen the Mounties first. The woman reared her flabby bulk upright in the birchbark, waving the yellow paddle and shrilling her warning in familiar Cree.

"What did I tell you?" Connors roared. "That fat lobster is crooked as a pig's tail!"

"I'll show you pretty darned quickly who we are!" Dorrance grunted in reply to the squaw's call, thrusting the blade down until the icy water lapped his wrist.

"*Kekway eoko? Kekway eoko?*"

The yell was taken up by the other Indians. It echoed down the canoe fleet, ringing out over the water, drowning the gulls' screaming.

Over Connors' heaving shoulder the sergeant glimpsed yellow faces staring at the oncoming canoe. The boy holding the chief's totem was waving it in defiance. Klapstein's squaw flopped down again when the trader whirled his craft about, shooting it back toward the Indians.

Now Dorrance could see the long black hair hanging down over the high cheekbones. He could distinguish the strained expressions on the tanned faces as the natives leaned forward.

But above the steady *whoosh-whoosh-whoosh* of his paddle other noises sounded. With a concerted yell the Chippewans broke into action. They drove their paddles down and sent the canoes forward toward the chief's craft.

"Attaboy!" the sergeant grunted, when Connors swung his blade over and forced the police canoe alongside Tuzu's vessel. Hands darted out, grasping the birchbark's rim, and for a long moment the two Mounties sat with heaving chests.

They stared at the huddled figure of the old chief, ears filled with the Indians' shouting, nostrils stinging with the smells of unwashed bodies and fishy deerskins.

"WHY IS this thing?" Dorrance challenged with his returning breath, gaze fixed on Tuzu's leathery face. "Why do the hunters of H'wan travel to the Barren Lands when the paying man comes to the post, bringing many presents from the great white king?"

The Mountie spoke in sing-song Cree, and at his words derisive laughs welled up from the crowding canoes.

"The redcoat lies!" a young buck yelped on the outskirts of the fleet. "The redcoat lies!" The cry was taken up until it became a savage chant.

Dorrance half swung about, and glimpsed Klapstein and his squaw endeavoring to thrust their canoe through the assembly of crafts now around the police vessel.

"You watch that trader, Tim!" the sergeant ordered, swinging back to the chief.

"Tuzu, you are an old man but one of little knowledge," Dorrance threw out. "You have listened to evil words from this man Klapstein, who is a very great liar. Why do you go to the Land of Little Sticks? Let a talk be made quickly."

The chief elevated his shrunken body, pointing a withered finger at the Mountie.

"Because the paying man comes no more," he croaked. "Because the great white king lies even as the redcoats lie. Because the government's word was broken, and there is no green eating money. *Ekuta!* I have spoken."

"*Hoi! Hoi!* The great chief speaks well. *Hoi! Hoi!*"

Yells from the Indians indicated that they were drinking in the old man's words.

Dorrance waited in grim silence until the shouting ceased, and Tuzu went on again:

"No more does your white king send powder, fish nets and flour for the Chippewans. Therefore we go to the country of the Es-ki-moh; to a new place of much fur, that we may not die. Klapstein, that very strong man, takes us to that

new land so there may be full bellies and no wailing in the teepees. *Hai!* He is good and he does not lie."

Es-ki-moh! Tuzu's words stabbed the sergeant's brain with sudden illumination. So that was the plan! Klapstein was leading the Indians into the inland Eskimos' territory!

The trader was taking no chances either, the Mountie well knew. East of the Dubawnt River was the richest treasure house of white fox in all the north. Hitherto the Indians had been afraid to penetrate it, living in terror of the Eskimos.

But even the belligerent little men from the Coast would not dare to interfere with an expedition led by a white man. Yes, Klapstein could make good his promises, and without risk or danger to himself.

"Spouts like a regular ballyhoo artist, don't he?" the constable laughed.

"Holy Mackerel! Don't you get it, Tim?" Dorrance queried over his shoulder. "The dirty slink! See the point? Klapstein had those post Indians scared speechless, and now he's taking these saps away into the Barrens with promises of a new hunting country. He knows it will be my finish if the tribe is not at the post to get the treaty money. Then I'll get sent back to headquarters and he has a free hand to do what he likes with the Indians. Well, I'll be—"

"THE CHIEF speaks well," Klapstein's coarse voice boomed out suddenly. "And what is this redcoat but a *moonias?* Here is one who talks always with the squaws, who plays with the children! *Pah!* Listen well, O, you people. We will take this one of the big mouth and throw him in the waters."

Dorrance could contain himself no longer. The police canoe rocked violently when he jerked upright. For a moment the sergeant stood erect and white faced against the background of dingy deerskins and black heads.

Yells broke from the Indians when the Mountie leaped from the canoe, to bound forward toward where the trader stood, darting from one wildly rocking craft to another.

Shocked into immobility by the suddenness of the attack, Klapstein stood staring at the oncoming Mountie, stubbled face puckered up into bristling ridges of surprise, great paws clenched.

A booming roar reached Dorrance's ears when his feet spurned the last canoe and he hurtled through the air, landing catlike in the trader's craft. For a split second he glimpsed the squaw's huddled black bulk where the woman crouched in the stern, holding with both hands to the nearest canoe.

The sergeant slashed a wicked uppercut to Klapstein's head—and missed. A bony fist stung his face. Then the trader's breath was on his neck and the stubbled chin grinding into his cheek.

Feet braced against the canoe's ribbing and arms locked; the two men thrust and strained. Both were unconscious of the driving paddles and Indians' yelling when the Chippewans endeavored to crowd their canoes closer to the struggling men.

Back and forth they teetered on the madly rocking canoe; tearing, jabbing, butting.

Whoosh!

Icy water engulfed the two men as they missed footage and tumbled backward into the lake. A second later they were on the surface again. Dorrance trod water, drawing his arm back for a blow.

In that moment a black bulk overshadowed him. The squaw leaned out of the canoe, her hands gripping the long paddle! Twice the heavy blade crashed down on Klapstein's head!

Whug! Another vicious blow just before the trader's black mop disappeared; great hands clutching at empty air.

"Never mind him! He's gone, I tell you!" Connors' voice boomed out above the shrill yelling. "He'd freeze to death in that water, even if he could swim. Get in! Get in! Oh, cats!"

For a long moment the sergeant's eyes searched the water. Then his numbing

fingers reached for the birchbark's brown blur.

"*Tlap knem! Tlap knem!*"

Dorrance was vaguely conscious of urging phrases. He sensed that the woman was clucking at him in Chinook, telling him to get into the canoe.

With an effort he grasped the gunwales. Hands tugged violently at his shoulders and much to his surprise the Mountie found himself in the little vessel with the woman leaning over him, endeavoring to force a paddle haft into his stiff fingers.

"*Nawi'tka! Nawi'tka!*" the squaw was hissing in Dorrance's ears, still tugging at his shoulders.

ALL AT once the Mountie's brain returned to normal. Beyond him he glimpsed a blurred circle of snarling, yellow faces. Above them Connors' thick frame, the sun glinting on a Colt's long barrel.

"Don't shoot, Tim! Don't shoot!" the sergeant yelled. He slashed the long blade down, driving the canoe into the press of craft about the constable.

Dorrance's paddle knocked a knife out of a yellow fist. The tough grained blade came down in a lightning series of slams on the black heads and deerskin shoulders.

Now the calm white man was a whirlwind of action. One moment he drove the canoe forward; the next second he was again flailing those cringing backs with the broad paddle.

No native blood could resist that furious attack. Hunting knives dropped, hands darted for the paddles. Yelps of dismay answered the Mountie's blows as the canoe passed from one craft to another. Still Dorrance balanced himself, striking viciously at the Chippewans.

The Indians could stand no more. They broke away from the red coated demon and with paddles spurting white water wheeled back for the way they had come.

"Back to the fort, Tuzu!" the sergeant's voice rang out above the cries. "There the paying man waits. Let there be no mistake, or a new chief will lead the hunters of H'wan!"

For a moment the aged leader turned about, outspread yellow hands at his temples in token of submission. Then forgetting his dignity, he picked up a paddle and slashed it into the water, determined to force his craft through the jumble of fleeing canoes.

"*Ayaz t'loos*— You are very good." A clucking voice suddenly brought Dorrance's mind back to the woman. "When none help the women there always the redcoat is. Now I am alone. You will send me back to the Great Water to my people?"

The sergeant's hand patted the fat shoulder.

"Yes, Kla'hane, I will send you home with many presents so that beyond the High Hills men will know that the redcoats do not forget."

"Some jane that!" Connors panted, as he paddled over. "Champion heavyweight stenog, by heck! What now?"

"Get in here," the sergeant ordered. "We'll go right after those Indians until they reach the post. All right, Tim; let drive. We'll have to go like sixty to keep up with that mob."

Followed by the curious, wheeling gulls, the canoe leaped across the gleaming water.

INDIA TYPES

By

Harry A. Franck

II

INDIAN BORN WHITES

THEY call them "white niggers" in India, those of our own race who first see the light in that far land; and those who are not given to biting sarcasm pity them. Not without reason, I had concluded, for never were Caucasians more truly robbed of their birthrights than these same Indian born whites, though they live out their lives, many of them, without so much as suspecting their misfortune.

The Irish keeper of the Allahabad "Strangers' Rest" had two sons. The father found no difficulty in holding his own with the sophisticated world beaters under his charge. But his heirs, save for a striking rotundity of figure and certain unmistakable features, bore him no resemblance. In European customs and modes of thought they were astoundingly ignorant, not from any lack of education, but merely because of an inability to grasp the point of view of their own race. In their thinking, in their actions, in their view of life, they were essentially Hindus.

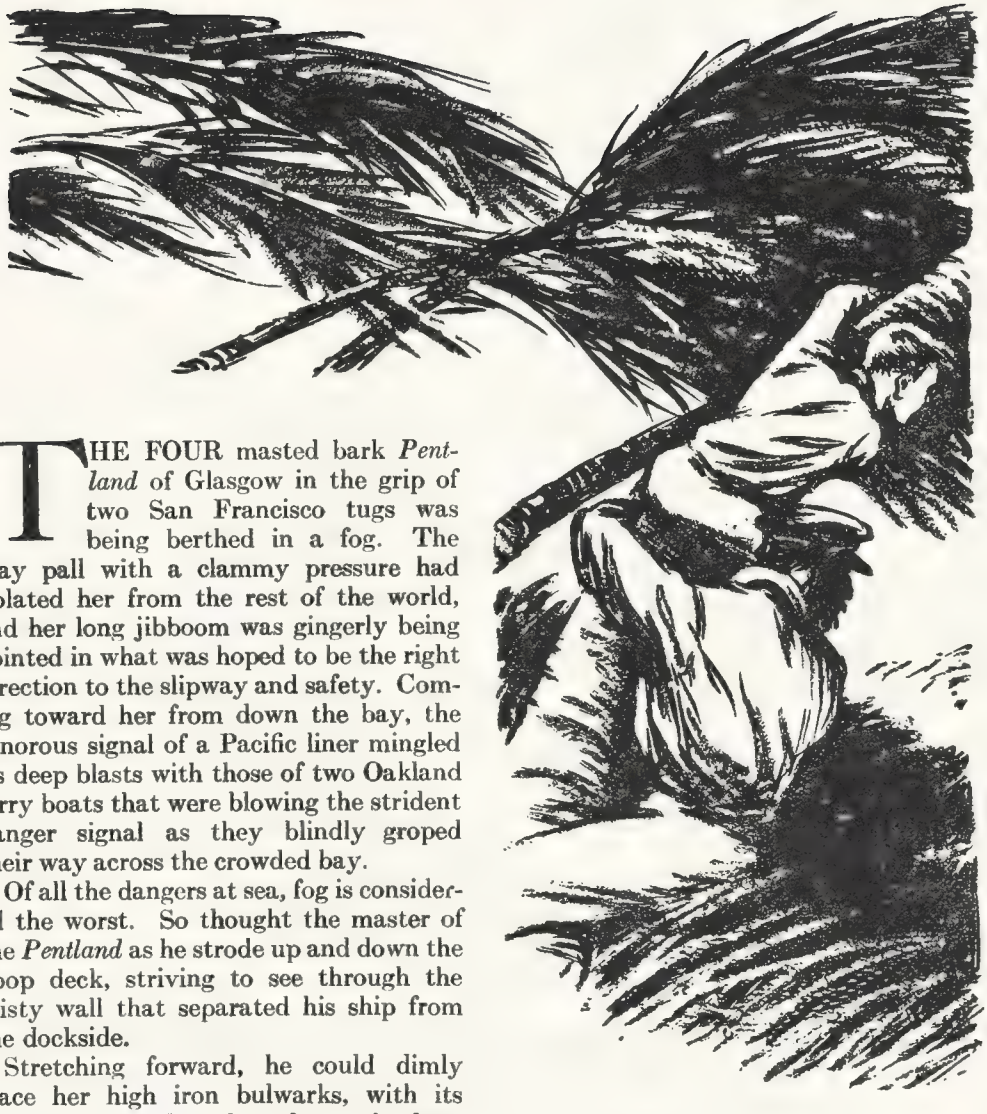
Nor were these characteristics peculiar to this pair as individuals. One meets "white niggers" all over India—and usually takes the earliest opportunity to cut short their acquaintance. Daily contact with natives, from childhood on, seems to develop that type which among us is dubbed "sissy". To the Western born the Indian reared white man is vacillating and silly, a mawkish, insipid fellow, as irrational and effeminate as the sons of our over-rich fellow citizens, surrounded by their regiments of servants, nurses and tutors. The child of the poorest "sahib" in India has native servers ever at his beck and call; the thousand and one minor duties of life he performs only by proxy. What wonder that with arrival at manhood he proves utterly incapable of performing larger duties and in times of stress falls helplessly back on those who have grown up under sterner climes?

The doings—or, more exactly, the failures to do—of the Anglo-Indian furnish tales that in number and variety are without limit or end. From the mass, a simple example, familiar to every wandering Occidental in the peninsula, may serve as illustrative of all, though it can be told in a sentence—

A certain "white nigger" agent at a village railway station telegraphed to his chief at headquarters hundreds of miles distant:

"Sir: Tiger dancing on the platform. Please arrange."

Which, multiplied by the largest number conceivable, sums up the characteristics of the "sahib" born in the realm of Siva and Krishna.



THE FOUR masted bark *Pentland* of Glasgow in the grip of two San Francisco tugs was being berthed in a fog. The gray pall with a clammy pressure had isolated her from the rest of the world, and her long jibboom was gingerly being pointed in what was hoped to be the right direction to the slipway and safety. Coming toward her from down the bay, the sonorous signal of a Pacific liner mingled its deep blasts with those of two Oakland ferry boats that were blowing the strident danger signal as they blindly groped their way across the crowded bay.

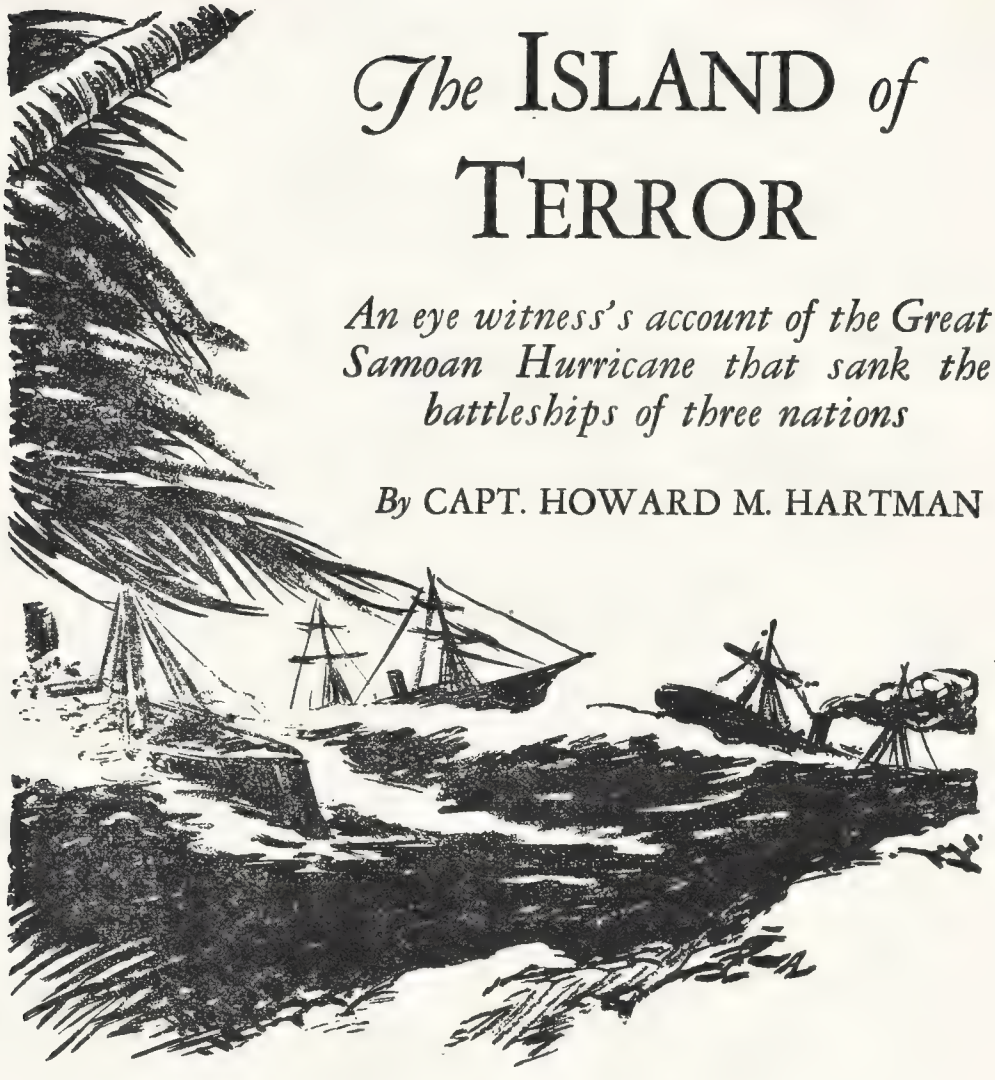
Of all the dangers at sea, fog is considered the worst. So thought the master of the *Pentland* as he strode up and down the poop deck, striving to see through the misty wall that separated his ship from the dockside.

Stretching forward, he could dimly trace her high iron bulwarks, with its white clinging shroud, as far as the forecastle head, where the mate with the port watch was superintending the forward mooring lines.

On the shore the discordant clanging of bells on the cable cars mingled with the clatter of steam winches; and the hiss of steam occasionally rose to a crescendo and drowned out the rumble of the heavy trucks on the cobblestones of the quayside. Ahead, the great dark bulk of the city loomed menacingly over the foreyard arms, and the pier heads faintly revealed themselves on either side.

The second mate with the starboard watch was getting out the fenders and stern lines on the after end of the main deck. Heaving lines were cast from bow and stern and hawsers were hauled to the dock to moor the ship as she slowly forged into the murky slipway and, like a wounded monster, tired after a long run before the hunters, took refuge in the misty cavern and flattened itself into obscurity against its walls.

The singing crew speedily warped and secured the ship to the dock, and lifted



The ISLAND *of* TERROR

An eye witness's account of the Great Samoan Hurricane that sank the battleships of three nations

By CAPT. HOWARD M. HARTMAN

the tarpaulins and hatches as the stevedores and longshoremen streamed across the bulwarks to the deck and went below to break out the cargo.

The rumbling of the heavy drays on the dock, like distant thunder, kept time to champing bit and hoof, and the hoarse cries of the carters were now added to the general uproar of the awakened city.

Along the quayside the misty veil was dissolving, and by ten o'clock the sun rays had partly lifted the fog, revealing the forest of masts and spars with their taut, glistening rigging tracing their outlines to the graceful hulls that crowded the busy waterfront.

Astern of the ship, the seagulls, like lost souls, were shrieking as they circled over a blotch of garbage floating on the surface of the flood tide, and beyond their flashing and skimming wings the faint outlines of Goat Island were unveiled, disclosing a large liner swinging at her anchorage, waiting for the Golden Gate to lift its misty portals.

THE *PENTLAND*, after a voyage of one hundred and twenty days from Liverpool, was hugging close to the pier, with her yards cockbilled, as if glad to be at rest. One member of the crew, at least, was glad that the voyage was at an end, and that was I, who, at that time a mere youngster, was serving as a seaman apprentice to my uncle, who incidentally was the master of the vessel. The voyage, the longest I had as yet taken, had instilled within me devotion to the sea.

Yet within me a feeling of unrest had arisen, a desire to learn and see more than was offered to me on this ship, the inborn longing of youth to attain more knowledge. Such is the impatience of the inexperienced young seaman who finds that at sea his horizon is an empty ring of sea and sky narrowed down to the harsh and exacting discipline of the small detached piece of man's handiwork on which he stands.

As I leaned against the knightheads on the forecastle my eyes were attracted to a South Sea Island trading schooner that was berthed ahead of my vessel.

Here was, to my mind, my dream ship —even with the Polynesian seamen, and a huge screaming parrot sitting in a barrel hoop swinging under the main boom. In the companionway of the after cockpit a bland faced Chinese steward in a blue dungaree smock was cleaning the brass hand rail. From the stern in large gold letters the name *Tiahieva* of Bando flashed its reflection on the surface of the incoming tide. The craft was about one hundred feet in length, painted white, her spars and monkey rail scintillating with fresh varnish, in the morning sun, and her rigging and running gear proudly declaring their newness.

Here was a little ship that any seaman could be proud of, I thought, as I filled my eyes with her graceful sheer. I wished that I could sail to the far off isles that had fired my imagination ever since reading Herman Melville's "Typee" and "Moby Dick". Here then, almost within reach, was the ideal vessel which could take me to the threshold of fairyland.

Throwing a swift glance over my shoulder at the tall masts and spars of the great iron ship on which I stood, I brought my gaze back to the deck of the trim little craft ahead, and a wave of discontent swept over me, submerging common sense, as I turned away and clambered down off the forecastle head. An unreasonable dislike for the great ship on which I stood took possession of me, and I forgot entirely all the storms through which she had safely brought me. The great iron bulwarks now appeared to encircle and magnify my discontent.

My uncle was in the starboard gangway ready to go ashore and beckoned me to come to him.

"Now, Howard," he said, "I'm going to some friends at Santa Anna for a week, and if there's anything that you want during my absence you can get it from the mate."

After saying this he turned sharply away and crossed the gangway to the dock. He had never pampered me; he treated me just as a member of the crew, which in itself was good discipline for the discontent within me, although I did not realize this as the time.

I followed him over the gangway and saw him enter a cab and drive away toward Market Street; then I wandered aimlessly along the dock until I came abreast of the *Tiahieva*. Here I had another thrill, as I watched the master of my dream ship emerge from the companionway and walk along the deck toward the main rigging.

THE CAPTAIN of the schooner was a large, burly, stoop shouldered man, with arms that allowed his hands to hang alongside of his knees, giving him a most awesome reach. A shock of coarse black hair, shot with gray, surmounted a wide forehead under which a pair of bright black eyes were separated by a broken nose that vainly tried to push down an upper lip that had a tendency to twist itself into a perpetual smile. His broad, determined chin aggressively

prevented his lower lip from sagging, although it was the resting place for six firm, protruding teeth. Attired in a sateen pajama suit of pink and green stripes, he presented quite a barbaric and unique contrast to his bare feet and hands which looked like big bunches of brown roots.

Here was a man who could take care of himself at all times, I thought, the great Diomedes worthy to instruct the young Ulysses. I had just read a book on the doings of that mythical king, and likened him to the man before me. Leaning against the bulwarks of his vessel, he seemed to suddenly sense, like a twin soul, the desire of my admiring glances, directed at his craft.

"Well, lad," he called out, "it's turned out fine after all the fog!"

"Yes, sir," I replied, drawing nearer to where the captain stood; after a pause I added impulsively, "That's a fine little ship you have, sir! I've been admiring her all morning!"

"Oh, you have, eh?" exclaimed this grotesque figure as his face lighted up. "Well, why don't you jump aboard and take a look around?"

"Oh, I say! May I really come aboard and look her over?"

"Jump!" was the only reply vouchsafed as he ambled aft toward the cockpit. Needing no further inducement, I scrambled over the rail and followed him.

I COULD never quite remember afterwards how I got aboard the *Tiahieva*, but the moment that I felt my feet firmly anchored to her snow white deck my vivid imagination could picture her in her natural environment, encircled by a South Sea Island atoll with its flashing sandy beaches topped by a crown of ever waving palms, under a turquoise sky, lulled forever to the tune of the surf breaking in a never ending shower at its base.

Eight bells was struck on the *Pentland*, which towered over the schooner's stern; and the rumbling of the trucks and winches on the dock was stilled. It was the noon hour, and the sun was at its zenith, beating down into the bay. I could hear from where I stood, my shipmates squabbling noisily over their mess tins. I turned and descended the companionway of the schooner.

In the quiet, well ordered, mahogany paneled saloon, with its stained glass skylight, and a compass swinging in gimbals, the captain had already taken his seat at the table which the Chinese steward had just laid for the midday meal.

"Ah, velly glood!" the Celestial cried. "Me ketchum plenty glood chow, Kapitani, savvy. Little sailor man he have chop too?" he inquired as he looked at me.

"Sure he will!" boomed the captain. "Won't ye?" he inquired as he looked at me.

"Why," I replied eagerly, "this seems all too good to be true; I would certainly like to, sir!"

"Well, then, that's settled. And say, Monk's my name. Captain Monk, and this is my trading schooner an' we hails from the Tonga Group down Samoa way, an' you're quite welcome aboard the *Tiahieva*."

"Howard, that's my name, sir, and I'm sure I never saw a prettier vessel than yours, sir!" I replied eagerly.

Sitting in his cozy arm chair, Captain Monk cast the luring spell of his islands about me. Story after story wove its magic web until, entranced with the enchanted word picture, I entirely forgot time and the *Pentland* and sat there as if in a dream. Shrewd questions were asked and answered until, at last, I almost sprung from my seat at what was proposed to me.

"Why," said this magician, "I should like to have you along with me. I need some one like you," he said wistfully. "D'you see, I have no kith or kin of my own, and you say that you are an orphan?" Here he paused.

"Yes," I cried eagerly. "I'm all alone in the world, excepting, of course, for my uncle. I don't think that he would mind very much if I ran away."

"Well," replied Captain Monk, "it's up to you. I'll have you willingly if you want to come. We are now only waiting for a lady and gentleman passenger who are arriving on the eight o'clock express from Los Angeles, after which we sail immediately."

"I'll come!" I cried. "I'll manage somehow to get my things and be aboard without fail."

One must not judge Captain Monk too harshly for encouraging a lad to desert his ship; for this happened in the palmy days of 1888 when the sailing ship was in the heydey of her career. Very little sentiment was wasted on a skipper who lost his crew; and captains resorted to all sorts of devices to secure suitable men for the vessels under their command.

I WALKED on air for the rest of the day, my head in the clouds. No one noticed, after sunset, a dark shadow lower a seabag from the long jibboom of the *Pentland* and disappear along the schooner's deck into the shadow of the companionway. On entering the saloon, Captain Monk gave me a berth aft on a settee in his own stateroom.

Promptly at nine o'clock that night the passengers arrived with their luggage and were shown to their quarters. The waiting tug immediately got the towline of the *Tiahieva* and started to tow her out into the bay.

Astern in a blaze of bluish electric light lay San Francisco, with its dark crown of Nob Hill dominating it in the background, up and down which its little beaded strings of lighted cable cars were crawling like fiery centipedes. Abreast of Goat Island the tug headed down the bay and made for the dark portals of the Golden Gate through which we silently slipped to sea on the outgoing tide.

Under the lighted shadow of the Cliff House a sentinel seal on the rocks gave a defiant bark as we crossed the bar. The tug shortly afterward ran us up into the wind and gave a short toot and dropped our line. We watched her lights mingle with the shore lights. To the tune of a Samoan war song the towline was hauled aboard by our native sailors, and the quest of my isle of dreams was on.

THE PASSENGERS' names were Mr. and Mrs. Arnstein, and I noticed, to my amazement, that they constantly spoke German in an undertone, a language I happened to understand. A few days later I had almost made up my mind to let them know that I had studied German, when something occurred that made me change my mind altogether. I happened to be in the saloon at the time, writing at the table beneath the skylight. Mrs. Arnstein was reclining in a deck chair beneath the awning, when her husband made a remark that caused her to laugh.

"Ah!" she exclaimed in German. "What a lucky thing that the ape of a captain can't understand what we're talking about. He's a regular bore with his constant trade talk on copra and pearls. Do you think the half of what he says is true?" she yawned.

"Yes, all of it and more!" rasped Mr. Arnstein in his harsh guttural voice. "Why," he added, lowering his voice, "he has a thousand rifles, ballasted with a million rounds of ammunition, under his deck at the present moment, and the whole of this is overlapped with some tawdry trade goods as a blind. He'll make ten thousand dollars in pearls this trip if I'm not much mistaken. That is, he thinks he will." This was said in a sarcastic undertone that could not be mistaken.

I was able to hear a great deal more of the subject that these two extraordinary persons were discussing. I was dumbfounded at what I heard! Plans to have my beloved Captain Monk thrown into prison and the dream ship seized by a German man of war came to my astonished ears. What was I to do? The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced that I should let the captain know without delay. That night, in the middle watch, when the captain called me, I related to him all the things I

had heard. The master, without any apparent emotion, admonished me not to mention what I had heard to any one.

"I'll get one of my Samoans to keep an eye on them," he said quietly. "My steward will extract the live teeth from their pistols and insert duds, and I'll make up my mind what I'm going to do with them when I get to Honolulu."

Captain Monk was not a sensationalist, and there was no doubt in his mind but what the Arnsteins were accredited agents to stop or sink his vessel at all costs. Probably behind them there were others to back them up in any action. He considered it a piece of good fortune, as he told me afterward, and an act of Providence that I who could understand German had happened to come along.

THE *TIAHIEVA* kept bowling down the latitudes with the perpetual northeast wind filling her great white sails. Under her forefoot she kept cutting and ploughing her way through the long swells of the Pacific with a noise of tumbling waters that rippled along her scuppers and gurgled around her rudder post. Day succeeded night with a monotony that became mechanical. The azure sky was streaked with opalescent clouds, springing out of the horizon astern, overtaking and passing onward to prepare a feast of delights for the eye.

The crafty Mr. Arnstein was daily making strenuous efforts to ingratiate himself in the captain's good graces. The rogue somehow sensed a flaw in his own behavior, and was trying to make up for it. His wife seemed suddenly to take a great interest in me, constantly asking me questions which, while not pointed, all seemed to trend in one direction.

Forewarned is forearmed, and the master and I were not to be caught with such simple devices, and we had decided on a policy from which we did not intend to deviate.

One day, just before sunset, the land haze on Molokai could be seen ahead. The sun in all its expiring glory faintly traced the purple mountain tops against the southern sky until the last rays dissolved over the western horizon, and the *Tiahieva* sailed solitary under the stars. During the night the wind freshened over the port quarter, causing the schooner to heel over in the phosphorescent sea, weirdly lighting up the lee side with ghostly light. Down on the starboard bow a heavy bank of black clouds, in which occasional flashes of lightning could be seen, denoting that the local disturbances were active.

The island of Oahu was dimly visible, like a black cloud, on the lee beam ever drawing nearer and nearer. The myriad stars swinging low overhead refusing to light the way to the dangerous shore line. Captain Monk, however, had been here many times before and knew exactly where he was heading.

Promptly at eight bells of the early morning watch, or to be exact, 4 A.M. a radiating flush of light foretold the birth of another day. The distant thunder of the surf could now be heard as the course was altered to the westward, and the booms jibed to port. Molokai with its head in the clouds was now astern. The pink dawn was flooding the whole eastern sky, the purple shadows of the mountain and clouds reflected in the sea. From the sea the sun, in all its glory, burst forth and stretched its rays, like long arms, before it started on its journey across the heavens.

Honolulu lay directly ahead and, as the schooner drew nearer, the wind started to die. Occasional cat paws however sent her onward to meet the scent of fruits and flowers and all the sounds of beasts and birds that came from the shore. Slowly she drew into the harbor, and came up into the wind, faintly fluttering her sails like the wings of a bird coming to rest.

THE ARNSTEINS with their luggage were ready to go ashore. They were profusely polite to the captain, I noticed, and insinuated that they would stay at a hotel while the schooner lay in the harbor.

The port doctor and harbor master paid

their visits in quick succession and the way was smoothed for us to go ashore. No sooner had our passengers left the vessel than Captain Monk came to me.

"Now then, lad," he said, "they're up to something that we don't know about. The Germans have three warships blockading Samoa, and they no doubt have a description of the consignment of our cargo. But I have a trick up my sleeve that will beat them all. We'll tranship our cargo. I'll go ashore and make arrangements at once. I have an agent here that will fix things up. These Arnsteins are playing with something that is likely to burn their fingers!"

"But can't we have them watched?" I inquired.

"Of course we can. You just follow me, lad, and I'll attend to that at once," the captain replied as he started to the forward part of the vessel.

Nukhi was a tall broad chested Samoan whom the captain had had in his service for a number of years, and he worshipped his master in the manner of a faithful dog. He saw the master coming forward, seemed to sense that he was wanted and immediately got to his feet.

"Too much glad," he greeted in a low tone. "You come along Nukhi to helpum Kapitani."

He stretched his great frame at this, and his large luminous eyes rested on his master with an affection that could not be mistaken.

"You go beach, Nukhi," whispered the captain, as he cautiously looked around. "You go along Mr. Arnstein; him no glad you come along, savvy, and suppose you look see no good, you come along tellum me. Me much glad to hear."

"Me savvy much, Kapitani," replied the native, as his eyes took on an intelligent glitter. "Ah, me watch em heap plenty!" he hissed and his nostrils expanded as if he scented his master's enemies.

"Nukhi, you tellum other Samoan boy, no go away ship, ketchum look see. Suppose him see no good, him tellum quick!" ordered the captain.

"Ugh!" grunted Nukhi, in evident pleasure as he showed his teeth and pointed to several long keen blades stuck in sharkskin sheaths inside the forecastle hatch.

"Samoan boy, he watch heap plenty, him much glad to come along and tellum!" he cried as he rubbed his hands.

As he turned and walked aft, Captain Monk was satisfied that he had posted his natives in such a manner that his vessel would be protected, and the Arnstein's intentions frustrated. An hour afterward the master went ashore with Nukhi, leaving me and the Samoan crew in charge.

ABOUT midnight a schooner came alongside with Captain Monk aboard, and the transshipment of the arms and ammunition was started. Hour after hour the crew worked feverishly, and just as day was breaking the last of the cargo had been transferred and the strange schooner stood to sea.

The master and I slept late that morning. We'd been up all night, and it had been a trying time for us, although I with the enthusiasm of youth, could not help but enjoy the essence of adventure that these happenings afforded. Nukhi reported about 10:30 that the Arnsteins had not left their hotel during the night, but were now closeted with the captain of the port. We instinctively knew then that something was afoot.

At eleven o'clock the captain of the port's gig pulled alongside, and that official followed by Arnstein and another gentleman stepped aboard and were met by Captain Monk at the gangway.

"I must apologize to you for this intrusion," the captain of the port was saying, "but a complaint has just been sworn out and lodged with me, by this gentleman—" pointing at Arnstein's companion—"who is the German consul here. He makes declaration that a state of war exists in Samoa against the sovereign ruler who is under the protection of the Imperial Government of Germany, and that the whole of the Samoan Islands are blockaded.

Have you any objection to being searched for contraband?"

"None whatever," replied the captain as he gave orders to the crew to remove the hatches.

Arnstein stood beside the hatch as the covers were being removed, a fiendish expression lighting up his face; he seemed hardly able to hide his impatience as the port official's henchmen disappeared below to search the vessel.

"You must excuse me for having you searched, Captain Monk," he blandly remarked to the master, who was standing beside him. "I didn't know that you'd have the gall to run guns while you were carrying passengers! You know my wife and I have rights!"

"Of course, you have, my dear Mr. Arnstein," was the abrupt reply. "You have all your rights ashore! Don't let us catch you coming aboard this vessel again or you'll get our lefts!"

"*Ach*, you think that is a joke!" he sneered. "Wait, just wait, a minute!"

Losing patience with the combined wait, he yelled down the hatch:

"Hey, you niggers! D'you mean to tell me that you can't find those cases of rifles. Why, there's a thousand weapons and one million rounds of ammunition! What the hell is the matter with you?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Arnstein," the captain of the port said angrily. "You leave the investigation to me!"

At that moment one of his men appeared from the hatch and conversed with him in an undertone.

"My men say there's nothing contraband here." The voice of the captain of the port was icy as he slowly uttered these words and cast a derisive glance in the direction of the Germans; then without another word he turned abruptly away and prepared to leave the schooner.

"I must apologize to you, Captain, for putting this indignity upon your vessel," he said as he entered his boat, followed by the Germans.

Arnstein, like a whipped cur, was apparently too dumbfounded to make reply.

Nukhi came aboard next morning and reported that he had seen Arnstein in conference with three of the lowest characters in Honolulu. The German, I reasoned, was not a man who would risk his own skin if he could help it, and the people who had hired him and his wife to sink or hand over the *Tiahieva* were undoubtedly expecting results. Captain Monk talked the matter over with me and told me of his intentions to lay awhile in Honolulu in order to throw the Arnstein gang off the scent.

NEXT day, after the captain had gone ashore, I was reclining in the hammock slung under the main boom, when a boat rowed alongside; and before the Samoan on duty could interpose, a degenerate white man, in rumpled dirty ducks, bounded over the rail and swaggered aft.

"What name you come?" challenged the Samoan as he jumped between the stranger and the mainmast.

"You tell Kapitani that he ketchum plenty good friend here!" the stranger cried as he twisted his loose lips into a grotesque smile and displayed a mouthful of rotten teeth.

"Kapitani no here, you ketchum beach, savvy?" the Samoan cried as he pointed toward the beach.

"Kapitani too much glad along he know he ketchem plenty dollars when he see me!" the stranger insisted, as he tried to force his way past the Samoan.

The native, straining forward like a dog on leash, was ready to resist any rush, and his eyes began to glow redly as he fumbled inside his shirt.

"Blast your black hide, you lousy Kanaka—stand aside!" he yelled as he half drew his gun from the holster under his arm.

"Ah, that will do for you! Jump! Blast you! When I talk along o' you, savvy! Now fetch me plenty good cold drink, an' quick!" he rasped, like a man sure of his ground.

I had heard the rumpus and jumped out of the hammock and taken up a posi-

tion behind the mainmast and thought it about time to interfere.

"Drop that gun on deck!" I commanded from behind the protection of the pin rail as I leveled my pistol at the swaggering beachcomber.

The stranger let his gun fall to the deck with a clatter, and started to whine:

"A nice way to treat an old friend of your captain! You'll be hearing more about this!"

"Up with your hands!" I commanded as I came from behind the mainmast.

The stranger turned quickly, with his hands half raised.

"You were told to get on the beach where you belong! Go!" I cried.

The beachcomber looked toward the rail, his mottled, inflamed features ablaze, as he drew his small piggish eyes into slits and with nervous hand fumbled with his mangy looking beard. After sizing me up, his half shut, shifty eyes swept the deck and then returned to the muzzle of the pistol I was holding.

"Well, I'll be damned! A kid!" he shrilled as he leered at me and parted his slack lips into a satirical grin.

"Why, you damned little slob!" he yelled.

He got no farther. The powerful Samoan, with one leap, caught him from behind with a belaying pin, stretching him on the deck, and in the twinkling of an eye had picked him up and hurled him over the rail on to the heads of his two beacher companions, nearly upsetting the crazy old cockleshell of a boat in which they had come alongside.

"Suppose you ketchum beach quick!" yelled the native seaman. "No more come along here!"

The trio needed no further threats to compel them to shove off, but after rowing a short distance away they lay on their oars and apparently held a consultation.

"We'll have everything ready for you next time you call!" I shouted across the water.

"Go to hell!" came the chorus from the disappointed rogues as they slowly rowed toward the shore.

I watched them through the glasses, as they landed on the beach, and were met there by Arnstein, who gestured and waved his arms like a madman. That evening when Captain Monk came aboard I related the incident to him. He nodded his head slowly and wisely as he remarked:

"They think that we bribed the captain of the port and his men and that we still have the arms and ammunition on board, and I want to encourage that belief. We'll set sail tonight as soon as Nukhi comes aboard. I gave him all instructions ashore today. Tonight we'll start crawling down the latitudes to Samoa."

PROMPTLY at eight o'clock that night Nukhi came aboard and reported that Arnstein was active and had secured two boats and some men. The captain, on hearing this, ordered the anchor to be hove short, and the gaskets off the sails. The boat was hoisted and secured, and everything made snug to go to sea at once. The Samoan sailors worked quickly and quietly; they sensed something unusual in the air. On the shore the lights of Honolulu blazed across the harbor, and among the palms on Waikiki Beach the scattered lights in the bungalows mingled with the low hanging stars whose reflections danced together on the surface of the dark waters. Behind the town the dark shadow of the island loomed like a black cloud.

Captain Monk gave me orders to set the sails and to heave up the anchor, and this I speedily accomplished, with the assistance of the crew, and reported all clear. The sails slowly filled away, and the *Tiahieva* slowly turned on her heel and was again on her voyage. The wind came in short puffs from the eastward and the schooner started slipping silently and smartly through the water, when out of the night came a hail:

"Schooner ahoy! Schooner ahoy!"

"Aye, aye!" cried Captain Monk. "What do you want?"

"This is Mr. Arnstein speaking, and I'd like to have a word with you, Captain,

before you sail! I'm sorry we've had that little misunderstanding!"

Captain Monk did not reply to this but altered the course of the schooner so as to bring the boat abeam. Arnstein was whispering to his boat's crew, and suddenly they gave way with their oars and and started to come alongside.

"Don't come alongside of my vessel!" cried our captain. "I'll sink you if you do!" As he shouted this he again altered the course and brought Arnstein's boat abaft the beam.

"You damn' old monkey faced gun runner!" yelled Arnstein, his face aflame with anger as he realized he'd been foiled again. "I'll see that a warship gets you before you get to Samoa!"

His voice died away, in a volley of curses, as the *Tiahieva* stood out to sea, leaving the dark peaks of Oahu behind. By morning a faint blue smudge was all that could be seen on the horizon.

THE LATTER part of February and the first half of March was abnormal for this time of the year. Gale succeeded gale, and the wind, at times, almost reached hurricane force. The little vessel, however, managed safely to continue her voyage, and on the morning of the 12th of March mountains of the Samoan group came up over the horizon.

The wind was fresh from the northward and the schooner staggered along before it under foresail and jib. After awhile the ships, anchored in the Bay of Apia could be seen through the misty spray on the barrier reef. The *Tiahieva* rolled and pitched toward the opening in the reef and passed the American flagship *Trenton* and her two consorts *Vandalia* and *Nipsic* at anchor. Parallel to them the German fleet was anchored, with the *Olga* heading the line and the *Adler* and *Eber* astern. Between the two fleets lay the British flagship *Calliope.*

Captain Monk held his course straight through the two fleets and ran over toward Matoutu side of the bay and anchored. He told me that we would not have long to wait if Arnstein's threat was to mature, as there were enough Germans in Apia to make things uncomfortable. Two Samoans who evidently had been on the watch, looking for our arrival, came aboard and assured the captain that the arms and ammunition had been safely landed. They, however, brought the warning that trouble might be expected.

Next morning the trade goods consigned to Mr. Moore were discharged and it was at this time that the master noticed that his every movement was being watched by the Germans. Every case and package of merchandise was closely scrutinized on the shore, but no effort was made to search.

The political tension between the nationals along the beach of Apia was acute, and Captain Monk instructed me to exercise the greatest caution.

"Keep your eyes open, and forget what you see," he admonished. "Let your ears be filled, but clamp your jaws so that your tongue doesn't run away with your brains!"

THE FOLLOWING day Captain Monk and I were invited ashore to stay at Mr. Moore's trading store, and as we pulled for the beach we landed beside a launch from the German man-of-war *Eber.* We were just about to step ashore, when we saw Arnstein, in the company of several German naval officers, approaching. He was speaking excitedly, in German, as he waved his arms and pointed at our schooner. Suddenly catching sight of us, he calmed down.

"*Ach,* Captain Monk!" he cried as he approached with extended hand. "You arrived safely, eh? Allow me to congratulate you!" he airily remarked with just a slight flavor of sarcasm. "I found the voyage on the way down damn' rough!"

Captain Monk studiously avoided the extended hand. He was amazed at the audacity of the man and couldn't help blurting out:

"Belay that damn' gab, Arnstein! What's your game? Have you left your

bunch of Honolulu beachcombing cutthroats behind? Stand aside!"

He roared in indignation as with one of his long arms he swept Arnstein out of his path and with the other saluted the officers.

"Excuse me, gentlemen!" he tensely murmured. "I'm sorry to see you in such questionable company!"

The German officers stepped into their own boat, shamed, followed by Arnstein, who shook his fist at us as he cried out:

"We're having your every movement watched, and as soon as you try to land that consignment of arms and ammunition that you have in your hold we will close down on you!" To emphasize his remark he sat down heavily in the stern of the boat as it was being pulled away from shore.

"We shall await with pleasure the result of your clever watchfulness!" yelled Captain Monk. "Damn it! I wonder the ocean didn't swallow you up before you got here!"

As if in answer to his cry the heavens suddenly opened up and the rain came down with a never ending deluge. Every one hurried toward shelter. Captain Monk and I ran as rapidly as we could but were soaked to the skin before we arrived beneath the wide sheltering veranda of Mr. Moore's trading station. He soon supplied us with a change of dry clothing. We remained ashore that night, and next morning the weather partly cleared. Arnstein, we were told, was still aboard the *Adler* and we suspected that he was trying to convince the captain of that vessel to send an armed party aboard our schooner to search her. We could not help smiling, as we thought of the surprised expression that would appear on his face when he found that the hold was empty.

About noontime the barometer started to drop, and I heard the captain remark to Mr. Moore that he thought we had better put to sea; but several bystanders, among whom was a young American Naval lieutenant, scouted the idea that a storm was coming. By 2:30 in the afternoon the glass had gone down to 29° 11″; however along about 4:30 a slight rise in the barometer led all the old-timers to believe that danger was passed. Thus went our opportunity to put to sea.

This should have been the time for every ship in the roadstead to have cleared to sea. A heavy swell was noted coming from the northward. And the great ships with their anchors moored east and west were bridled with a clear hawse to the north. All their top hamper had been struck as they steamed under slow bell at their anchorage. As night came on the wind started to come in strong fitful squalls, followed with occasional downpours that swallowed up the fleet's riding lights in an impenetrable pall through which the weird cries of men and the clanking of iron was carried to the ears of those on shore.

Through the town the rivers were now discharging their torrents from behind the town into the bay. The sky partly cleared, and great, black, ragged clouds were torn away from the northern horizon and, flying low across the sky, gave the impression that the remaining stars were racing away to hide themsevles.

THE WIND now worked itself up into a steady gale of tempestuous proportions, and the seven great warships between the inner and outer reef reared and plunged like enormous black horses as they balked and champed at the procession of heavy seas that charged down upon them through the narrow cleft in the barrier reef. The noise of the pounding surf made speech impossible. The great palm fronds snapped and cracked like a battery of machine guns, and the low, black, ragged clouds swept their tops continually as they chased inland and plunged over the mountainside.

We now could hear an occasional crash cut the blackness of the night, as some of the small trading vessels snapped their moorings and were carried on the crest of a wave and dumped on the edge of the palm fringed shore toward Matautu. All

of the brotherhood of the sea, including the traders and natives, breasted the fury of the wind, and we made our way to where the great seas leaped out of the darkness and broke themselves into huge white tumbling pinnacles of surf, sending shoreward heavy salt spray to cut the eyes of puny men who dared to challenge the storm gods!

Captain Monk with his heavy legs asprawl, leaning against the pressure of the wind like some huge bulky animal of prehistoric times, was shading his eyes with one of his wide, horny hands.

His long left arm encircled me as I clung desperately to his wide leather belt. At last he saw something that held his eyes for a moment, and he put his wide mouth right down to my ear and bellowed, but the sound of his voice seemed to come from a long distance.

"I've caught sight of our little ship, lad! She's been carried right up on the sand to the edge of the trees! See!"

His yell came to me faintly as I looked to where he pointed.

I could get only occasional glimpses of the *Tiahieva*, lying high up the beach on her side with the tall palms almost bent to the earth behind her. I opened my mouth to reply, but the words were rammed down my throat.

ALL THROUGH the night destruction rode the tempest and threatened the unhappy ships with complete annihilation as they reared and plunged between the inner and outer reefs, with the Island of Terror and its deep caverned reef under their sterns. Their captains were anxiously waiting the break of day as the tempest gradually attained hurricane force. Captain Monk and some of the more mature brothers of the sea were anticipating a tragedy and were dragging ropes toward the beach preparing to save life.

At 4 A.M. just before daylight, the *Eber*, with Arnstein aboard, had dragged her anchors so close in that a great sea lifted her stern and flung her against the reef, driving her rudder straight up through her deck. On the shore we, the more fortunate ones, heard the hollow crash. Her cables had parted and, rebounding on the next sea, she again crashed against the reef; and amid the faint wail of her doomed crew she reared her unfortunate head toward the black, storm swept sky, turned over and was swept into the submerged caverns in front of the coral reef, hidden forever.

Out of the whole ship's company that fought for life, a few moments before, only four survivors reached the shore with their cut and bruised bodies as mute evidence of the Titan battle they waged against the furious elements. We knew none of them and realized in that moment that Arnstein had perished.

Daylight came peering through the dark gray smudge along the shore and could only be distinguished fitfully between the welter of rain and spray. The *Nipsic*, *Adler*, *Vandalia* and *Calliope* had now dragged their moorings to a position in front of the inner reef, where utter destruction threatened them.

Here they reared and plunged as they steamed desperately to relieve the strain on their cables, fencing and dodging each other as the giant seas ranged up bodily in front and breaking with terrific force over them. Neptune was angry and had called on all the resources of the gods to concentrate them on that little indention of the barrier reef.

To those who would have sprung at one another's throats barely twenty-four hours ago the sight of the overwrought elements was subduing. The extravagant headlong dives of the doomed ships, perilously plunging with their sterns high in the air, then rearing themselves majestically — how gigantically they would rise in a halo of flying scud on the next and stagger crazily for a moment, then lurch dangerously toward one another.

I was clinging to Captain Monk, who had taken up a position behind the large bole of an uprooted tree. Next to us, kneeling, was Mr. Barker, the missionary, his lips moving in prayer. Every sheltered spot held its quota of streaming,

awe struck faces. There were moments of terrific suspense, when we would hold our breath at an avalanche of water driving across the inner reef with just the faint outlines of the unfortunate ship's masts flaying the low racing clouds beyond!

"They can't last long at that, lad!" the captain yelled down my ear, his voice coming as from the bottom of a deep well. "They're doomed!"

The roaring wind embraced and gagged us, and I was unable to make any reply. Immediately afterward, or about 6:30, the American warship *Nipsic* parted her moorings and was carried, rearing and plunging, into the current of the spewing Vasiangano River, which set a current along the face of the inner reef. We watched her breathlessly, as she staggered toward the southeastward and stranded on the sandy beach.

Several hours later a hollow *crash-crash* that could be heard throughout the town gave warning that the German warship *Adler* had gone to her last resting place. From where we stood we saw them slip their cables as their vessel rose on the crest of a gigantic wave that towered high over the reef and flung her on her beam ends on the hard unyielding coral, where the breeching seas bombarded her and sent the spray a hundred feet into the air.

The hurricane was now at its height as it lashed the seas into a jumble. Great pieces of low flying clouds sprung from seaward and were torn momentarily apart, revealing the terrible predicament of the three ships that now had dragged their moorings close down under the inner reef.

The American flagship *Trenton*, more fortunate, was still able to hold her moorings in the narrow entrance to the roadstead, and could occasionally be seen through the driving mist as she reared her bow straight to the sky, then sank out of sight in the trough of the long Pacific swells.

It looked now as if nothing could save these mighty ships, fighting with their teeth bared against the storm gods. The British flagship *Calliope*, sandwiched between the American warship *Vandalia* and the German flagship *Olga* was being threatened with instant destruction. She had swung to port, fouling the *Vandalia;* then rearing bodily up, she plunged and buried herself in the next sea and was nearly rammed and sent to the bottom by the *Olga*, which now had swung quickly to port. Again the *Calliope* collided with the *Vandalia*, drastically cutting into her stern.

ONE OF the most dramatic and intense incidents of the whole tragedy was being enacted before our eyes. The *Calliope* had but one chance in a thousand of cheating fate, and her captain realized this to its fullest extent. There under his stern lay the clutching, awesome reef, ready to draw his ship into its submerged caverns. To seaward, in the narrow channel lay the *Trenton*, wallowing at times dangerously across the course. Could he make the open sea? He chanced it! Steaming frantically, he slipped his cables.

From where we stood it looked as if his ship was imminently on the reef as she pitched and dodged between the rival dangers, and it was several hours before we could note that he had drawn clear of the two vessels that had almost sent his ship to the bottom.

About this time the *Vandalia* dragged her anchors astern of the *Olga*, and shortly afterward her stern struck the reef. A towering sea picked up her bow, carried it around dizzily until she was headed to the eastward. There she pounded against the reef in a wild welter of flying breeching seas. She sank. Only the masts and fighting tops could be seen jutting above the waves. The survivors desperately clung to them.

The British vessel had now clawed herself to windward, with her decks constantly flooded, and was faced with the hazardous task of passing the American flagship, which was still clinging desperately to her moorings in the narrow fairway, rolling and pitching, her fires extinguished, a totally disabled hulk.

Steadily toward her stern the *Calliope* crept, first with bow buried deep, and then flung high over the doomed ship's stern. Onward she crept and clawed at the towering seas, as the elements in a fury hurled themselves upon her as if to cut off her escape. Solid walls of water rushed toward her as if to overwhelm her. Into these she wallowed, sending it in great columns along her streaming decks.

From the shore it looked as if she was headed for the reef on the east side of the fairway, and for a moment she paused ominously on a white capped sea, with her foreyard arm high over the American's stern. Then she disappeared into the ghastly trough of an immense sea and reappeared an instant afterward, slowly turning to seaward. Gradually she was merged into the mist of the hurricane, the only vessel to escape.

We could now see only two vessels afloat, the *Trenton* and the *Olga*. The latter was steaming desperately at her moorings to keep from dragging her anchors and crashing on the reef. The former, partly filled, was drunkenly pitching and rolling, awaiting the inevitable end.

About 3:30 the fury of the hurricane had settled down to a steady roar, mingling with the tremendous, crushing thunder of the gigantic waves against the hollow face of the inner reef. Danger was stalking nakedly along the beach, as the sea threw up pieces of wreckage with which the wind bombarded the shoreline with flying missiles that made it dangerous for us to expose ourselves.

It now looked as if the great storm gods were angry at the escape of the *Calliope* and had drawn their furies into the narrow circle of the tiny roadstead.

The *Trenton* suddenly parted her cables and started to drift into the harbor. Frantic efforts were being made to assist her with sails and by placing part of her crew in the rigging, but she was driven, stern foremost, toward the inner reef, charging with appalling lurches, first to starboard and then to port as if blindly seeking to destroy the only remaining ship, besides herself, in the bay.

Twice the captain of the German vessel avoided a collision by desperately steaming and dodging, but by some irony of fate the ships were drawn closer, and suddenly the *Trenton* was rammed in the stern, first from the port and then from starboard. The latter impact parted the *Olga's* cables and her captain immediately set all the sail the vessel could carry. With engines full speed, he headed her for the sands of Matautu and beached her.

The *Trenton*, as if by some invisible magnet, was gradually drawn toward her unfortunate sister ship *Vandalia*, and for a time it looked as if she would be the cause of bringing total destruction to the remaining members of the crew, who were desperately clinging to the masts and tops; these however were saved by lines before she struck. All night she pounded against her submerged neighbor.

When morning broke the bay was bereft of sail. Devastation, sublime in its appalling completeness, made us all feel like minute atoms in the presence of the gigantic invisible power that had scattered and piled up the wreckage, as evidence of its might.

For some days afterward the sea cast up the dead, and all animosities were forgotten, for the time, in the face of the terrible calamity that had come from the sea. Captain Monk and I busied ourselves with the remains of the *Tiahieva*, preparing her for whatever fate had in store.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Bertrand W. Sinclair

WE ARE delighted to stretch hands across the fire to Mr. Sinclair, on the occasion of his first long story in this magazine. He has been and is an active hunter, angler and yachtsman. He specializes in horses and dogs—and shoots a wicked 85 at golf.

How could any man tell all about himself in a hundred and fifty words—even if he could be induced to do so? My life history is like the annals of the poor, short and simple—always bearing in mind that the simple tends to evolve into the complex. Probably *Adventure* readers don't care two whoops where I was born or how I grew up. But I was born—in Scotland—grew up in Montana and the Canadian Northwest. Rambled here and there between the Gulf of Mexico and Great Slave Lake on the north and south. East and west my habitat ranged from the Big Muddy to the Pacific coast. Acquired education enough to fit words together, in the interims of punching cows for a living—with no thought of publication. Don't need to say how old I am, but without becoming too decrepit to pursue the nimble mountain goat, or wade these infernally cold British Columbia streams after cutthroat trout, I still lived in the old West when it was comparatively young, and saw Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming pass through the transition from a cattleman's heaven, to a farmer's struggle to make the desert blossom like the rose, and spoil it—for a cowpuncher—in the process. There are two sections of this American continent that I know inside out, because I grew up in one and make my home in the other, and have worked and played in both without thinking of them as so much literary material.

The first story I ever wrote was a story of a cowpuncher—by a cowpuncher. Like the first drink or the first kiss or the first cigarette, it called for more. Have been doing it ever since. You will find one thing in any yarn I have ever done—an authentic background. And I have been doing it quite a while—and I shall probably continue to write novels like "Wild West," "Poor Man's Rock," the "Inverted Pyramid." My first novel was published in 1914. It is still alive. However, they say only the good die young.

I hope the fellows who read *Adventure* can see Sun Prairie, Milk River and the Larb Hills in "Room for the Rolling M" as clearly as the picture of them twenty-odd years ago still rises up on my mental horizon.

Further than that deponent sayeth not. Probably a considerable percentage of *Adventure* readers have read my stuff elsewhere. I've always had a pretty wide and complimentary and sympathetic audience, and I've appreciated it. When it comes to stories I'd rather let my own stuff speak for me. By a man's works ye shall know him. And that is as it should be. Sincerely.—BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR.

Travelers' Tales

OSTRICH drumsticks make me "hongry" too. Comrade Rose's letter and Comrade Young's reply to it bring out a lot of facts about the sports, geography and fowls of Patagonia.

Have read *Adventure* for many years and much as I like it I can not keep up with you. You print them too fast, and I have only now finished your July first number of 1927 in which Mr. Edgar Young in a letter regarding Indian runners in Patagonia hunting ostriches.

This is the second time the fact of hunting ostriches in Patagonia was mentioned in your magazine and I take exception to this statement, I spent some time in Punta Arenas on the Straits of Magellan within sight of Tierra del Fuego which was formerly Patagonia but now Chile, and nary a trace of an ostrich or even of a feather of one did I see there. However, when in South Africa one could not put a foot on shore without knowing that ostriches were raised there. Every shop had them, and boys tried to sell us feathers on the trains.

In Punta Arenas there was a little museum of natural history. There were many species of penguin and many varieties of native birds but no ostriches. The only hunting I heard of down there was that of the Indians themselves. In Tierra del Fuego the owners of sheep ranches engaged hunters to kill Indians and paid them five dollars for each pair of ears they brought in of dead Indians. The names of the ranch owners who ordered the massacre of the Indians were told me and that of one of the Indian hunters who, they say, is still living. I have forgotten the names but can procure them if it interests you. Have spent almost five years roaming around this globe and did not miss a number of your magazine which was forwarded to me—CHAS. ROSE, New York City.

Now, my boy, you are all wet on the ostrich question. I did not say there were ostriches running about the streets of Punta Arenas (Old Port Starvation). I didn't see any in the town myself. I spat some amber under that long stove at the Royal Hotel myself while I listened to the Scotch proprietor tell how he got that cross shaped scar on the back of his hand and I know that burg pretty well as she was quite a few years ago.

So you see you haven't been anywhere down there I haven't been. When you mention the bounty paid on Indian heads I can tell you that they were still paying it when I was down there but I do know that this bounty was discontinued a short time after I left. However, I keep close track on that part of the world and I know there are ostriches being raised on the upper Chubut and quite a distance south of there right now. I am quite sure there are some to be found south of the Straits on Tierra del Fuego in their natural habitat at the present time. They were discovered by Mr. Charles Darwin right there and were named after him (*Rhea Darwini*). The rhea, or South American ostrich, is of two sorts, one larger than the other and lighter in color, and are of wide distribution over southern S. A.

Now it's like this: The Big Feet (Patagones, or Tehuelches) winter for a couple of months right north of the Straits of Magellan and when the mild winter breaks they head north. They used to, in the very old days, hike it on foot. They wore big double overshoes of rawhide that made immense tracks and when the early Spaniards saw these tracks they named them *Patagones* (big feet), figuring the foot from the track. They called the country to the *north* (now applied to the island south of the Straits) of the Straits Fireland, or Tierra del Fuego, from the hunting fires the Indians used to drive game in the big circles they threw out, using the smoke of the fire to show the track of the point riders and also to hold the game inside the crescent as it closed it. Later they used horses and they were still using them in my time.

They made the annual trek of some two thousand or more miles up along the Andes and back down further east in an immense loop, figuring to arrive there for the next winter. It is only quite recently they have stopped making this long trip and doubtless a few of them still make it today for with the exception of a few large ranches and the Welsh Colony on the Chubut there is plenty of broken pampa to hunt over. The main game they got was guanacos, pumas, and ostriches (called *nu* in the Indian language). They traded the skins of these with the few trading posts on the rivers they encountered on the return trip and also with the Araucanians of eastern Chili, also the feathers of the ostriches that were fit to trade. With the others the women made feather pillows and feather bed robes (which were always lousy but warm).

In a book written a few years ago by a man who came into Patagonia to search for and find *the skin of a prehistoric giant sloth* I notice he mentions a gaucho that was in his party balling ostriches and plucking the feathers to stick behind his saddle for trading in the towns. I have seen men do the same thing and I have seen Indians with a great quantity of them for the same purpose. It is a trick of the Indians to drive ostriches into icy water so as to make them torpid so they can be easily balled with the *boleadores*. The ostrich is supposed to be a warm weather fowl but they are found in their natural habitat in S. A. down to a climate that compares with Labrador in latitude but is less cold. In the northern part of Argentine, in Uruguay, and southern Brazil I have personally seen thousands of ostriches being herded on the plains like cattle. I made the trip overland from Sao Paulo, Brazil, to Montevideo. I have seen thousands of monkeys in southern Brazil in the temperate zone forests where a foot of snow sometimes falls in the winter time. The men who were working for me would climb up and catch them as they sat on the limbs of trees half stupid from cold.

SO I'M not wrong, old man, it's you. The South American ostrich, or rhea, is a true ostrich with but a slight difference in the feet.

The plumes are not quite so good as the African plumes and on an average the ostriches are smaller but now and then you see some that are just as large as anything Africa can show. The plumes

are exported from Buenos Aires and Montevideo and there is considerable leather from ostriches being worked into pocketbooks and handbags for ladies and exported. You can buy them right here in New York. And I want to say right here that when a man sinks his teeth into an ostrich leg, roasted *con cuero* over an open fire he has bit into something good. Or a gizzard that has been split and cleaned and roasted with a hot stone stuck into it. Hush your mouth, honey, you make me hongry!

At any rate I'm having a lot of fun answering this, and no hard feelings at all, at all.—EDGAR YOUNG.

A Scrambled World

IT IS NOT often that *Adventure* prints a fact narrative of this length. Yet Captain Hartman's story seemed both dramatic and unusual to us.

"The Island of Terror" is a true story, suggesting again that truth is stranger than fiction. In 1889 the United States of America was closer to the brink of war with the Imperial Government of Germany than at any time during the early part of the World War.

Many historians believe that the great hurricane that occurred on the 16th of March, 1889, prevented strife between the two countries. The beginning of that year, weather conditions were abnormal in the South Pacific Isles, gale succeded gale, which culminated in the great Samoan hurricane which centered on the Bay of Apia, annihilating the whole of the ships anchored there, excepting one.

To each man that goes down to the sea in ships there comes a time, in his life, when the combined forces of nature prove to him that his puny efforts to conquer them are futile. This great catastrophe leaves behind a trail of survivors who remember that their cries were gagged by the terrific force of the roaring tempest, and their ears filled with the gigantic wrathful voices of the gods, driving before them the most fearsome and ghastly sights, until eyes were filled with horror and the brain numbed.

When the sea and sky are drawn together in one mad tumult, nothing can be seen excepting the small frail detached piece of man's handiwork to which he desperately clings until his courage is looted and death claims him in violence.

Death pitied me; and it is of such an episode that I write and dedicate my story to Mr. H. J. Moore, American trader, and the Rev. W. E. Clark of the London Missionary Society, for their kindness to a youngster in distress during the Great Samoan hurricane, 1889.—CAPTAIN HOWARD M. HARTMAN, 1383 Cadillac Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

The God Who Got In Wrong

HE WAS a Chinese monkey deity, and an obstreperous critter from start to finish. I regret that *Adventure* can not reproduce in full color the tableau of his downfall, sent along with the following letter, by Dr. Hallock.

I have just read articles by missing-link seekers. In one was reproduced a photo—an ape's foot much like a human foot. The author said it proved our ape ancestry. Recently I handled a snapshot of a native with a tail nearly four inches long. Another proof! But a few years ago I saw in Japan a stuffed calf with a human face—a strong proof that we've sprung from cows! So what are we to think? The articles amused as they said believers in their theory were of up-to-date, modern, superior minds. But their "new" ideas seem like plagiarisms, as the Chinese have had variations of them for thousands of years. These superior-minded men say we came up from the monkey, and are even in some sense divine! The Chinese say the monkey—excepting his face—became not only man but also a god, had his temples and was worshiped in China. I enclose the picture of a monkey-god.

The Chinese say he was hatched, by gentle zephyrs, from a stone egg on a rocky mountain, to be a delight to the upper-god. But, alas, he was a trouble maker. He was ambitious and his exploits caused him to be acclaimed king of the animals and to wax strong. Through Long-Wang he got an iron rod which he could expand at will to span the sky or contract so as to fit in his ear—magic wand! Pu-ti taught him how to fly and how to change himself into 72 different shapes. What he could not do is hard to say. But as he gained in power, and his friends said he was worthy to rule heaven, he wished to do so. Many kings made league with him and celebrated it with feasting.

But our monkey got drunk, and while unconscious he was taken to hell. He awoke, overcame the powers of hell and escaped. He was accused to Long-Wang who thought to keep monkey quiet by bestowing upon him the title "Heavenly Horse-keeper." He was elated; but learning it was an empty title, he, in fierce anger, smashed heaven's gate and overturned the throne. The upper-god called upon the hosts of heaven and hell to overcome the monkey; but in vain. After the monkey's victory the upper-god, in fright, conceded monkey's demands, made him a god, conferred upon him a real title, and allowed him to live in heaven in a grand castle.

But monkey-god was not godly! He would steal, stealing and eating the peaches of everlasting life and, from Lao Chun's palace, stole and ate his pills of immortality. Doubly immortal, proud of his powers, he constantly mocked the other gods. He became unbearably overbearing. A great conference was called in heaven to which great Buddha was summoned. The monkey-god even tried to mock this, the "self-existent one"!

"I'll bet you can't leap out of my hand. If you do I'll make you King of Heaven." The monkey eagerly answered, "I can turn over 108,000 *li* in one somersault, why shouldn't I leap out of your hand?" Then the monkey-god turned a somersault

to the five white pillars—limits of the universe—and wrote his name on one, to show he'd been there, and turned a somersault back in triumph.

"Didn't I turn out of your hand?" asked the monkey-god.

"See what you wrote on my finger!" the Buddha answered, and showed monkey his name on his finger—one of the pillars!

Monkey gazed amazed. Buddha seized him, put him under a mountain, fed him with hot iron to punish him for his many sins, and said, "After a number of years a monk named Dang Sen will come and free you. You shall follow and guard him as he goes for the books of Buddha from the Western Paradise." Years sped; all came true; monkey reformed, became true to his title, "The holiest in the heaven," and people began to worship him.

We teach my brownies not these myths but the truth as given in the Bible. God's word for it satisfies us. Chinese teachings do not ennoble or make life safe in China; but where God's Word holds sway is goodness, safety and life. Pray that the Chinese may know the Bible, and know Jesus Christ—God and man—as their own precious Savior. With kindest regards.—(REV.) H. G. C. HALLOCK, C. P. O., Box No. 1234, Shanghai, China.

Bullets In The Fire

HERE Captain Dingle—who offers to run our cargo of gifts down to Tristan Da Cunha—tells of an experiment. It was a corking exhibit.

Ahoy!

Slide over to looard and give a sailor a breeze on this burned cartridge thing. I have missed the previous talks, perhaps because of my wandering ways; but just now saw Brother Big Jim Harriman's letter in Camp-Fire.

Some years ago I was writing a serial, "A Shot At A Venture," for *Adventure*, and meant to use two tricks of ammunition magic to astonish the natives. Writing for *Adventure*, naturally I had to be sure that my hokum was not plain soakum.

First, I wanted to have my hero grin at a presented gun, calmly (must be calmly) stuff his cigar into the muzzle, and let the shooter shoot. So before writing I took my trusty Savage automatic, put a roll of greased rag in the muzzle, and shot 'er off. In my yarn I said the barrel of the old trade gun swelled, the breech block blew out, and tore off the bloke's eyebrows. In my case the automatic barrel swole, the breech opened and stayed open. I was betting on my eyebrows by using an automatic, d'ye see?

But to the burned bullets. I also wanted my two-fisted hero to chuck a lot of cartridges into a campfire surrounded by natives and sting 'em enough to scare 'em. I'm no gunman, but even I had a notion that a bullet fired anywhere but down a pipe of some sort would not have much velocity or range. So I built a fire on my island in Bermuda, an iron tank on one side, a rock on another, a wall, and the sea completing the square. Then I got me a fistful of cartridges, .250-3000 rifle, .380 automatic, and a few old .44's I borrowed. I told the man where they were afterwards, in case he wanted to get 'em back. But to get to results. I got into the tank, chucked the whole issue into the fire, and ducked inside.

It sounded like the battle of the Falklands for two minutes! No two shells exploded together. Some hit the iron with a bloody thump, and on getting out some time later I found as many bullets as cases hit. The wall, and rock were smudged with as many bits of brass as lead. But quite as many cartridges busted right there in the fire, and both parts stayed there, torn and mis-shapen of course, as flew.

As I said, I'm no gun expert. I simply relate what actually happened in an actual trial conducted by myself just to make sure that *Adventure* readers got real dope in their fiction. Don't ask me why anything happened, or how to explain what did happen.

But I'll remark in closing that I couldn't keep count of the explosions, so I stayed inside that tank an hour after the last one popped—just on general principles.

Luck to you all, boys.—DINGLE.

How to Shrink A Head

COMRADE McCUNE says that all the bony parts are removed, in the process of shrinking, as practiced on this tributary of the Amazon. One of frivolous mind might wonder what might be left as trophies, after a thorough-going raid upon the "ivory" of organized baseball . . . ?

A primitive and gruesome art, if "art" it may be called, that flourished among the Jivaro Indians along the Marañon River in Ecuador and Peru, is rapidly passing into the limbo of forgotten things, due to the legislation of beneficent governments lacking a possible sense of humor.

Every race has, it appears, a hobby. And whether this be the Spaniard and his bullfight, the native of India and his hasheesh, or the indigenous American with his tobacco and scalping knife, it took the aboriginal Indian of South America, to raise the whole question of provocative hobbies to the *n*th degree.

In the not so distant past a warrior of the many tribes, neighbors to the Jivaro, might gather up his weapons of the chase, grunt good-day to his wives and set off down the trail. And then, likely as not, by nightfall his head, shrunk to the size of an orange, would be stuck on the end of a pole outside the entrance to some proud Jivaro's chateau.

Since the Jivaro was a past master of the art, let us follow him as he starts out to execute his grisly mission. For brevity, let us say he has obtained a nice fresh head. Swiftly, before blood and brains can coagulate and set, he returns to his

hut. Outside the entrance he seats himself cross-legged before a fire whereon boils a quantity of water. Skillfully he slits the skin of the back of the neck to the base of the occiput. Then with a maul he cracks the skull much as one might break a coconut. Piece by piece the entire interior of the head, including the brain, skull and small bones is extracted through the neck until only the scalp and fleshy covering of the face remains.

Completing this operation, he submerges the head in the boiling water to which certain antiseptic herbs have been added. What these herbs were is not definitely known, though probably they belonged to the same general group as those employed by the ancient Egyptians, along with pitch and bitumen, in the preservation of their mummies.

When the head, now only a flabby tissue of scalp and flesh, has shrunk to approximately one-half its original size, our Jivaro inserts a round, heated stone in the interior, the stone roughly sized to that of the head. Then the exterior is ironed with another smooth hot stone. Under the effect of the heat and pressure the head shrinks to the size of the inner stone, which is then replaced by smaller ones until the final stone is the size of a man's fist. The stones prevent the head from drying out of shape. After the head has at last been brought to size, the crown is perforated and a cord of suspension is made fast.

And now for the final artistic touches. Sometimes a cluster of string is threaded through both the upper and lower lips before the flesh has finally set. These strings make a sort of tassel anything from a foot to eighteen inches long. Sometimes the faces, too, may be painted in vivid colors. Favorite shades appear to be bright red or a dirty yellow. I have seen four of these miniature heads, and three of these have shown such a remarkable fidelity to life as to be startling. It is only a long inspection that brings out the fact that the eyelashes are disproportionally long, that the hair, especially in the case of the women, is out of all relation to the size of the head in its length, and that the eyelids are crinkled like crimped tin at the corners. Being thin, the eyelid does not shrink, and likewise, cannot be "ironed" like the rest of the head. The skin of the face is smooth, otherwise, and of a brown or black color.

The entire process is complete in a day—life to a kind of immortality, as it were.

No warrior ever left on a war expedition in the "good old days" without a full set of stones upon which to dry possible enemies' heads. Should he return with a head, a tribal celebration was held, in which the head, suspended from a pole, was the principal feature. The warrior observed certain rites and rigid restrictions, and had a thousand taboos concerning these heads, for it was believed that great harm would befall the victor were these not observed. Once the ritual was completed and the heads properly shrunk, they were preserved as individual trophies of the warpath.

This completes the record of one bit of aboriginal savagery brought beyond the point of sheer brutality because of the real art and high technical skill required to preserve the features, so natural in miniature that they seem to be "sleeping doll" heads.—THORNTON C. MCCUNE.

Old-Timers, Attention

DAN ("SLED") WHEELER has returned! He will appear again in the pages of *Adventure*—and this long complete novel is one of the most breathless and exciting stories our friend Doctor John I. Cochrane ever wrote. Watch for it, in an issue of early fall.

Talbot Mundy—do I see a couple dozen of you chaps straighten up for a moment and forget to drag on the old briars?—is with us again, after far too long an absence. A series of stories of India by him will start soon; and then we shall have a splendid serial novel in Mundy's best vein.

Two serial novels by W. C. Tuttle, serials by Bertrand W. Sinclair, Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, William Patterson White, and other topnotch writers, are carded.

But then, lend an ear! Pascal Covici, the New York book publisher, purchased in France an unfinished fragment of a novel by Alexander Dumas. It is a gallant, swift action serial of The Three Musketeers — of Richelieu, Anne of Austria, and the rest of that scheming, terrible company of intriguers. H. Bedford-Jones, who wrote "The King's Passport," has translated and finished the story. It is immense!!

This novel will be run in three parts, beginning in the September fifteenth issue of *Adventure*. In connection with it—as prizes for critical letters (announcement soon)—we will give five books as prizes. Each of these books will be luxuriously bound, and in each copy will be bound a page of the original manuscript in the handwriting of Alexander Dumas.—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Coin

BACK to the time of the French Revolution goes this interesting piece, and on it is engraved the evidence of the waning fortunes of a once brilliant monarchy.

Request:—"I wonder if you could tell me what this coin is that I have. Its a pretty battered old piece and some of the words I can't make out, but it is evidently a two-sous piece, and has the words: 'La Nation, La Loi, Le Roi.' I think the metal is copper."—C. F. LONG, Wilmette, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—The coin you send a rubbing of is a two-sous piece, struck by Louis XVI of France after the beginning of the French Revolution, and I think before he was executed. The piece is interesting, because you will note his title is not "King of France" but "King of the French." The motto on the back came in after 1789, and we note that the king's is the last of the three names: "La Nation, La Loi, Le Roi." You will also note that it was struck in the "fourth year of Liberty." Unfortunately, these pieces are still common and have no especial value.

Submarines

RULES governing lights carried by undersea craft under way and at anchor.

Request:—"I wish you would tell me what kind of lights a submarine is required to carry, and at what distance above deck, or surface, if awash. I can't find anything special on 'Submarines' in either the International or Inland rules, so I presume they come under the rules for general craft, motor driven."—THOS. L. SULLIVAN, Boston, Mass.

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—Submarines carry lights that are called for by the International rules of the road.

No. 1 is the red port light; this has no particular height, but must be visible at least two miles. It shows from dead ahead to two points abaft the beam on the port side.

No. 2 is the green starboard light; this has no particular height, but must be visible at least two miles. It shows from dead ahead to points abaft the beam on the starboard side.

No. 3 is the masthead light; this is a white light; it shows from two points abaft the beam to dead ahead and to two points abaft the beam on the other

side, this is in one straight beam of light. It must be visible at least five miles. The total distance it should be visible is twenty points, or ten points each way from dead ahead. It must be placed on or in front of the foremast, or if the vessel has no foremast, then in the forward part of the vessel.

No. 4 is the range light; this is a white light, and may be carried by a vessel, the carrying of it is up to the vessel; they are not compelled to carry it. Most Naval vessels carry them. This light is similar to the masthead light. The law says that it must be carried in a vertical line over the other, in line with the keel, and at least 15 feet over the other.

No. 5 is a taffrail light, carried by Naval vessels; this is placed on the rail at the stern or at the level of the deck; it shows only dead astern, is a white light and is visible about two miles.

The above lights are carried when a ship is under way. By visible at a certain distance means that the lights shall be visible on a dark night with clear atmosphere.

When at anchor, the above lights are discontinued. Then if the vessel is over 150 feet long, they carry forward where it can best be seen a white light, placed at a height not exceeding 20 feet above the hull. This light so arranged a clear unbroken light visible all around the horizon, at least to the distance of one mile, when at anchor. If the vessel is over 150 feet long, it must carry in addition a light at the stern, but, not less than 15 feet lower than the other.

In addition to the above the following applies: At night when approaching an anchorage where are likely to be found Naval ships, men-o-war shall hoist at the peak two white lights in a vertical line. When at anchor in port and sighting an incoming ship making this display of lights, U. S. ships at anchor shall answer such display by making the same signal.

The World's Lightest Wood

ABOUT half as heavy as cork, it may be used for pincushions, razor strops —and rafts.

Request:—"Will you please send me an answer concerning the lightest wood in the world to-day?"
—M. P. Reilly, Reno, Nev.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—Balsa wood is the lightest known wood in the world today. It is native to Central America. The name is from the Spanish word meaning "raft", which they applied to it after seeing the natives use it for rafts.

When the wood is dry, it has a weight of 7.3 lbs per cubic foot; cork, in comparison, weighs 13.7 lbs. per cubic foot. The weight of spruce is 27 lbs. per cubic foot. Spruce is the wood most used in aeroplane building. Although Balsa is such a light weight wood, yet and found to be fully half as strong as spruce. This strength comes from its peculiar structure, which is that of barrel shaped cells.

The Indians of Central America make rafts of it big enough to transport cattle down the Wanks River, between Nicaragua and Honduras.

Balsa wood is also called *maguey,* and also *polok* by the Mosquito Indians of Honduras. The outer skin is thin and hard on this wood. Cross sections of the branches are used by the natives for pincushions; and the barbers of the country cut off the outer shell and use the "pith" for a razor strop; and it makes a good one. I have used one successfully in the tropics for 20 years.

The U. S. Navy is now using Balsa wood in their life-rafts as regular equipment, so it must be reliable or they would not adopt it.

Photography

THREE formulae for solutions to remove stains from negatives.

Request:—"I would like to know if there is any way that a negative stained with hypo or water can be cleaned.

Could you recommend a book on photography that treats on photography and not a digression on the English language?"—Oliver B. Nadeau, Nadeau, Mich.

Reply, by Mr. Paul Anderson:—Both hypo stains and water stains on negatives are apt to be obstinate, but try one of the following:

(1) Water..... 20 ounces
Chrome alum..... 90 grains
Hydrochloric acid c. p.....½ ounce

Soak the plate until stain disappears (15 or 20 minutes or less) wash in several changes of water, and dry.

(2) Water..... 10 ounces
Potassium bichromate.....150 grains
Potassium bromide..... 50 grains
Hydrochloric acid c.p..... 50 minims

Bleach in the above, wash in several changes of water, redevelop in a clean developer, wash, and dry. This intensifies the negative, and is therefore not desirable if negative is already strong.

(3) Javelle water. Obtain a small quantity from your local druggist, acidify it slightly with oxalic acid, and soak the negative until stain disappears. This should not take longer than 10 or 15 minutes, and negative should not be left longer than that, as the solution softens the gelatine markedly.

"Saturday With My Camera," by S. C. Johnson (J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia) is a good book for both beginners and advanced workers. Also, for moderately advanced workers, I have written a book, "Pictorial Photography, Its Principles and Practice," also published by Lippincott, which you may find helpful. It is devoted to pictorial work, rather than general, so you will have to judge whether or not it will be of use to you. Both of these books, though, are strictly business.

Chinchilla

THIS rat is really a prairie dog, with a fetching permanent curl and a middle toe nail that enables him to walk up a vertical cliff, if so it pleases him.

Request:—"We are contemplating fur raising as a business and are trying to gather information regarding the valuable fur animals.

At this time we are making an effort to know more of the real chinchilla rats or other rats of this class with valuable furs.

—W. C. QUARLES, Pueblo, Colo.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—A few years ago I made quite an extensive study of the chincilla rats through library sources and other methods. I have forgotten most of my authorities on the subject but still remember the main points. I will try to boil it down to a few lines:

The chinchilla is one of two sorts of S. A. prairie dogs that live in cliffs instead of holes in the ground. The fur of the other one is no good. This particular curly haired gentleman has a long middle toe nail which enables him to climb up a vertical cliff, or one leaning slightly backward. He goes in holes and crevices at a high rate of speed and is very wary so far as traps are concerned. Hence they are hunted by the Indians with a small weazel and in this manner have been almost exterminated; and due to this fact the Bolivian government (Bolivia and Chili is where most of them are found) has put a ban on exported chinchilla fur and also the live animals. They appear just about like one of our prairie dogs with curly hair and I am pretty sure they would cross breed with them just as they do with the S. A. prairie dog or *vizcacha*.

"Induction" Telegraphy

AN INTERESTING phenomenon that under certain conditions permits one to hear telegraphic signals over the telephone.

Request:—"I have a machine with which I am able to pick up common telephone talk and signals very plainly. Also the telegraph signals, as used by the railroads. These are very loud. Now what have I got to have to ring a bell, when the bell rings in the receiver?

I can hear the telephone bell very plainly when they ring on nearby lines. Can I put in a bell or buzzer with some kind of a relay and change the sound back and make the bell ring?

If this can be done, please give me an outline of what I want to get. And some idea of the cost.

I am quite sure it can be done, but I can't dope out."—FRANK A. WEICHMAN, Esperance, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNicol—On the Lehigh Valley R.R. forty years ago, Mr. Edison used for a time a system of "induction" telegraphy, whereby telegraphing from a moving train was done. A wire along the top of the cars carried the current for sending, or picked it up by induction from a parallel wire along the track, for receiving.

Of course a telephone receiver had to be used for reception, as the current was too small to operate relays.

Where telephone wires are not transposed, what passes over them may be picked up by induction in any wire system parallel thereto. It is a usual experience along railroads to hear in telephone receivers telegraph signals passing over adjacent lines. Sometimes the cause is "conduction" as well as "induction." A telegraph circuit and a telephone circuit using a common ground contact, where the earth connection is not good electrically, frequently have interference.

The bell ringing current you hear in your telephone receiver, from ringing signals on the adjacent line, is not strong enough to ring a bell by induction, or to operate a relay. Why not try an induction coil and condenser to actuate a telephone receiver loud enough to take the place of a bell? For composite ringing on some railroads they use a "howler" telephone receiver to give the signal in place of a bell. This is a sort of loudspeaker.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 841 Lake St., Oak Park, Illinois.

Yachting BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash., or HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, operating cost, legislative restrictions, public safety.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3 Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 429 Wilson Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign LIEUT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, Marine Corps Fleet Reserve, Box 1042, Medford, Oregon.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology *(a) Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies). (c) Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball JOE F. CARR, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 160 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, Port Angeles, Washington.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times*, Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 60 East 34 Street, New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, 2121 New York Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documented steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean (Siberian Waters).*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 5316 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.*—CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 5** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., Tyler Hotel, Louisville, Ky. and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., N. Y. C.

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and O. E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

✠**Africa Part 2** *Sudan.*—W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 3 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tunis and Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. COLLINS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Via Box 335, Azusa, California.

✠**Africa Part 8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, 14837 Grand River Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentine and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, Marlboro, Maine, c/o L. L. Brown.

West Indies *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, 236 Fox Ave., San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading in Canada Part 1, and fur farming.—FRED L. BOWDEN, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.* JAS. F. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Trips for Sport and Adventure—big game, fishing, canoeing, Northland travel, also H. B. Company Posts, Indian tribes and present conditions.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"). 1805 Stroh Building, Detroit, Michigan.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 7 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.* Also yachting.—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

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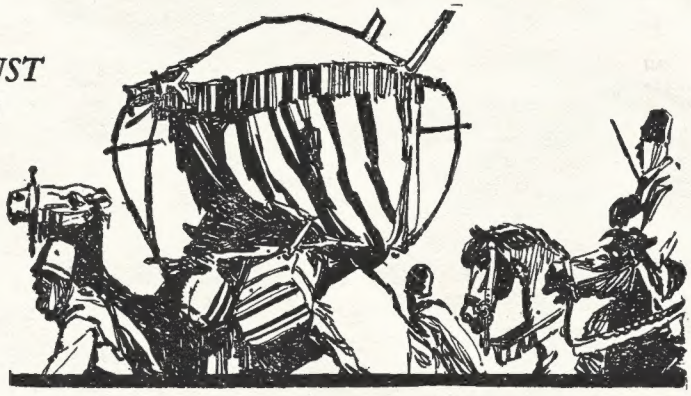

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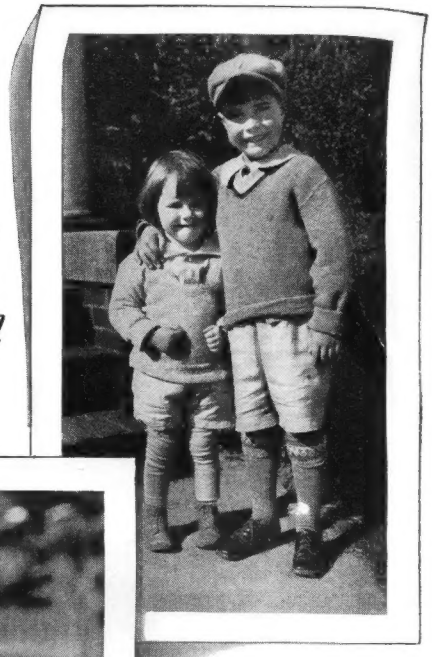

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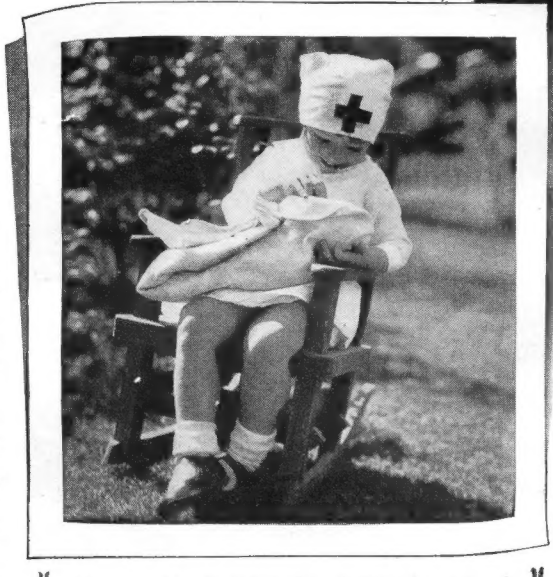

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